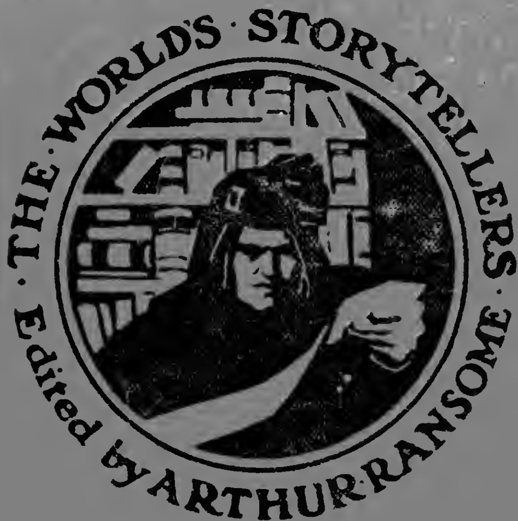

Stories by

BALZAC

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STORIES BY
HONORÉ DE BALZAC

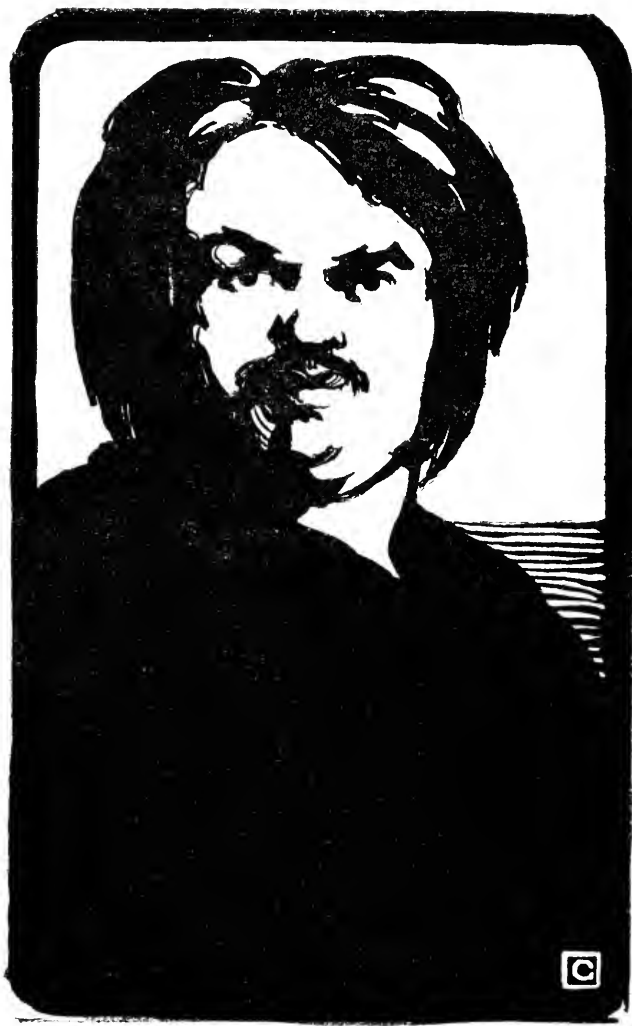
The World's Story Tellers

Uniform in size and style with this volume.

STORIES BY GAUTIER
STORIES BY HOFFMANN
STORIES BY BALZAC
STORIES BY STEELE
STORIES BY ADDISON
STORIES BY GOLDSMITH
STORIES BY CHATEAUBRIAND
STORIES BY POE
STORIES BY NASH
STORIES BY TOLSTOY
STORIES BY BOCCACCIO
STORIES BY MALORY

And from 'Arabian Nights,' the 'Gesta Romanorum,' etc.

Others in Preparation.



THE WORLD'S STORY TELLERS
EDITED BY ARTHUR RANSOME

STORIES

BY

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY
1909

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SUMMARISED CHRONOLOGY

Honoré de Balzac was born at Tours on May 20, 1799, *the son of a barrister, whose principal passion seems to have been for a longevity that would let him reap the benefit of a tontine. Balzac went to school at Vendôme, but he was a delicate, rather slow child, and had to be removed. Later, when his family came to Paris, he studied law at the Sorbonne, and then worked in a notary's office. In* 1820 *his family returned to the country, and Balzac, who had rebelled from the law and was writing in a garret on the smallest conceivable allowance, remained, to make himself a novelist. Until* 1829 *he had published nothing worth reading, but had spent his time writing second-rate stories something after the manner of Scott. In* 1829 *he published* Les Chouans, *the first book he signed, and from that time on his writings count in the* Works *of the Balzac we know. He fell in love with a Countess Hanska, and, even in his busiest periods, was ready to make journeys half across Europe to see her for a moment. After her husband died she hesitated a little and married Balzac, after an engagement that had lasted many years, five months before his death on August* 20, 1850. *Among the most famous of his novels in his huge series* La Comédie Humaine, *are* La Peau de Chagrin, 1831 ; Le Médecin de Campagne, 1833 ;

Eugénie Grandet, 1834; La Recherche de l'Absolu, 1834; Le Père Goriot, 1835; La Cousine Bette, 1846; Le Cousin Pons, 1847. *The series contains over fifty stories illustrating Private, Provincial, Parisian, Military and Political Life, as well as stories that he classified as philosophic and analytical studies. He also wrote a number of plays, not at all successful, and three volumes of* Contes Drôlatiques *in the French of the sixteenth century, preserving not only the indecency but the more generally admirable qualities that belonged to story-tellers of that time.*

INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BALZAC used to tell a story of his father, who, when asked to carve a partridge, not knowing how to set about it, rolled up his sleeves, gripped his knife and fork, and cut it in four with such energy as to cleave the plate at the same time and embed the knife in the table. That was the manner of setting about things natural to Balzac himself. He was a 'joyous wild boar' of a man, with the build and strength of a navvy. He was never ill. Gautier tells us that the habitual expression of that powerful face was a kind of Rabelaisian glee. Now a man who could write the *Comédie Humaine*, and look aside from it with a Rabelaisian glee was perhaps the only kind of man who could have attempted such a task without being turned, willy nilly, into a pedant.

There was a logic, a completeness in the groundwork of the scheme, that would have sterilised the imagination of a man with less exuberant vitality. Compare for a moment the *Comédie Humaine* with the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Scott meant to Balzac what Maria Edgeworth had meant to himself. He had seen in her an attempt to paint Irish country and character, and

had decided to do the same for Scotland. Balzac after those ten years of bad mediæval stories, those ten years of labour for the Rachel of his own soul, saw in him an attempt to paint Scottish country and character, and decided to do the same for France. But, whereas Scott had been brought up on the 'Reliques of English Poetry,' and in the country of purple heather, grey rock and leaping stream, Balzac was nourished on philosophy and science, and spent his youth in a Paris lodging. Scott saw men rather than kinds of man. Bailie Nicol Jarvie is more Nicol Jarvie than Bailie. Balzac comes at life in a much more scientific spirit. 'Does not Society make of man,' he asks, 'as many different men as there are varieties in zoology? The differences between a soldier, a labourer, an administrator, an idler, a savant, a statesman, a merchant, a sailor, a poet, a pauper, a priest, are, though more difficult to seize, as considerable as those that distinguish the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the sea calf, the goat, etc.' Balzac made up his mind to collect specimens of the social species, not pressed and dried, like the old 'Characters' of the seventeenth century, but exhibited alive and in their natural surroundings. He was to make a world with the colour of contemporary France, an 'august lie, true in its details,' a world complete in itself, a world in which all the characters were to show the impress of that state of life to which it should please Balzac to call them. That was the idea that turned the Waverley

Novels into the *Comédie Humaine*, that the idea whose exposition by a less full-blooded professor would have been so readily precise, so readily dull in its precision.

Now there are few harder tasks for a man of overflowing physical energy than this, of covering innumerable sheets of paper with wriggling precise lines traced with the end of a pen. It is likely to become a torment; the feet cross and uncross, the fingers itch, the inkpot flies across the room, and the energy defeats itself. There is the legend of Scott's hand, covering sheet after sheet so swiftly and with such regularity that it was painful to watch it; but Scott's was not the bomb-like brute energy of Balzac. Balzac, to give life to his scientific ideas, needed a more fiery vitality than Scott's, who began and ended with merely human notions. The actual writing of his books was proportionately more difficult for him. There was no mere eccentricity in his habit of getting the sketches for his books set up in type, and enlarging them from proofs in the middle of large sheets of paper, covering the vast margins with the additions that were to make the books themselves. It was a wise attempt to give himself the same physical outlet as that enjoyed by the painter or sculptor, to give himself something to pull about, something actual, something that could be attacked, anything rather than the terrible silkworm spinning of a single endless fibre. His energy would have been wasted in a hundred ways unless, so far as was possible, he had fitted his work to

himself and himself to his work. Giant of concentration as he was, he added cubits to his stature by taking thought. He made his writing hours different from every one else's, wore a white frock something like a monk's habit, and found in the drinking of enormous quantities of coffee a stimulant as much theatrical as medicinal. These things meant much to him, and his use of them was an action similar to that of Poe's schoolboy, who, when guessing odd or even the marbles in his playmate's hand, would imitate the expression of his adversary's face and see what thoughts arose in his mind. The paraphernalia of work were likely to induce the proper spirit. When all his fellow Parisians were in bed, Balzac, gathering the voluminous white folds about his sturdy person, and glancing at the coffee stewing on the fire, sat down to his writing-table with the conviction of an alderman sitting down to a city dinner. There could never be a doubt in his mind as to the purpose for which he was there.

This navvy-work of production had its influence on the character of his writing. But it was never in Balzac's nature to have understood Gautier's craftsman's delight in the polishing and chasing of diminutive things. Balzac, the working machine, was simply enormous energy so coaxed and trained as to produce an enormous output. The raw material of his rich humanity passed through violent processes. It had but small chance of any very delicate finish. Balzac

thought in books and in cycles of books, never in pages, paragraphs or sentences. Although he was much preoccupied with 'style,' envying the men whose writing would be charming to the ear even if it meant nothing to the mind, the best of his own prose is unbeautiful, rugged, fiercely energetic, peculiarly his own, and therefore not to be grumbled at. He would have liked to write finely, just as he would have liked *la vie splendide*. But his mind, delivering pickaxe blows, or furiously wrestling with great masses of material, could not clothe itself in stately periods. Always, out of any splendour that he made for it, shows a brown, brawny arm, and the splendour becomes an impertinence. He had ideas on art, as he had ideas on science, but his was too large a humanity to allow itself to be subordinate to either. He was too full-blooded a man to be withered by a theory. He was too eager to say what he had in his mouth to be patient in the modulation of his voice. He was almost too much of a man to be an artist. To think of that man fashioning small perfect poems, who avowed that he wrote his *Contes Drôlatiques* because he happened to notice the fall in the French birth rate, is to think of a Colossus tinkering at the mechanism of a watch.

Then, too, he had been too close to life to think of art for art's sake. During the years that followed his setting up author in a garret, he had watched the existence of those who are so near starvation that they

seem to make a living by sweeping the doorstep of Death. And, at the same time that, walking out in the evenings, and following a workman and his wife on their way home, he had been able to feel their rags upon his back, and to walk with their broken shoes upon his feet, he had also had his glimpses of *la vie splendide*, the more vivid, no doubt, for their contrast with the sober realities he knew. To this man, however great a writer he might become, life would always mean more than books. It always did. He could cut short other people's lamentations by saying, 'Well, but let us talk of real things; let us talk of Eugénie Grandet,' but Eugénie Grandet, the miser's daughter, interested him much more than the mere novel of that name. His people never existed for the sake of his books, but always his books for the sake of his people. He makes a story one-legged or humpbacked without scruple, so long as by doing so he can make his readers see a man and his circumstances exactly as they appeared to himself. He was not, like a pure artist, an instrument on which life played, producing beautiful things. His concern with life was always positive. His world was not a world of dream and patterned imagery, but, according to his mood, was an elaborate piece of mechanism and he an impassioned mechanician, or a zoological garden and he an impassioned zoologist. It is almost matter for wonder that such a man should choose to express himself in narrative.

And yet the novel, as he conceived it, gave him the

best of opportunities for putting his results before the world. If we allow ourselves to set all our attention on politics and finance and social theory, we lose in life all but the smell of blue-books, and the grey colour of Stock Exchange returns. If Balzac had written science, and not stories, we should have only had the ideas of his novels without that passionate presentment of concrete things that gives those ideas their vitality. Indeed, the novels are far greater than the ideas, just as the poetic, seeing man in Balzac was greater than the scientist. Weariless in distinguishing man from man, type from type, specimen from specimen, by the slightest indication of the clay, he was able in novels, as he could never have done in works of science, to give the colour of each man's life expressed in his actions, in his talk, in his choice of clothes, in the furniture of his room. The action of all novels, like that of all plays, is performed in the brain of the reader or spectator. The novelists' and dramatists' characters are like pieces on a chessboard, symbols of possibilities not obviously expressed. In older fiction these possibilities were left so vague that the reader could adopt any part he chose, without in the least interfering with the story, independent as that was of personal character. Never before Balzac made them had the chessmen assumed so much of human detail. In his books they are no longer pegs of wood, depending for their meanings on the reader's generosity, for their adventures on the ingenuity of the author. They

make their moves in their own rights. The hero of a Balzac novel is not the reader, in borrowed clothes, undergoing a series of quite arbitrary experiences. He cannot be made to do what the author requires, but fills his own suits, and has a private life. Balzac knows and makes his reader feel that his characters have not leapt ready-made into the world to eat and drink through a couple of hundred pages and vanish whence they came. They have left their mark on things, and things have left their mark on them. They have lived in pages where he has not seen them, and Balzac never drags them to take a part in existences to which they do not belong. I can remember no case where Balzac uses a stock scene, a room, or a garden, or a valley that would do for anything. There was only one room, one valley, one garden, where the characters could have said those words, lost that money, or kissed those kisses, and Balzac's stupendous energy is equal not only to pouring life into his people, but also to forcing the particular scene upon his canvas with such vivid strokes that every cobble seems to have a heart, and every flower in a pot to sway its blossoms with the sun. Even in the short stories, where he often follows gods that are not his own, writing of madness like a Hoffman, and of intrigue like a Boccaccio, his peculiar genius is apparent in the environments. How carefully, in *The Atheist's Mass*, he works out the conditions of life that made the story possible for its actors. And, in the longer novels, there is scarcely a sentence

unweighted with evidence that is of real import to him who would truly understand the characters and happenings of the book. How much does not the story of *Eugénie Grandet* owe to that description of the little money-getting, vine-growing town of Saumur, with its cobbled streets, its old houses, its greedy faces watching the weather from the house doors, the only proper setting for the narrow power of Goodman Grandet, and the leaden monotony of his daughter's life?

Balzac's fierce determination that his lies should be true in their details has often been remarked in claiming him as the first of the French realists. And, indeed, other of his characteristics, his interest in life as it is, the scientific bias that found its parody in Zola, his fearlessness in choice of subject, his entire freedom from classical ideals, are certainly attributes of realism. Realism is ready, like Balzac, to deal with stock exchanges and bakeries and all the side shops of civilisation; realism finds Greek Greek and not an Elixir of Life; realism tries to see life as it is. But realism (an impossible ideal) needs for its approximate attainment a man of ordinary energy; and this Balzac was not. Balzac used Thor's hammer, not one from the carpenter's shop. He lived like ten men and so do his characters. A crossing sweeper in a story by Balzac would wear out his broom in half an hour, but the broom of a crossing sweeper of de Maupassant or Flaubert would be certain of an average life. Balzac's

world is not the world of realism, because it goes too fast, like a clock without a pendulum running at full speed. His world is more alive than ours, and so are his men. They are demons, men carried to the nth power. Fire runs in their veins instead of blood, and we watch them with something like terror, as if we were peeping into hell. They are superhuman like Balzac himself, and have become a kind of lesser divinities. None but he would have dared 'to frame their fearful symmetry.' None but they could so well have illustrated existence as Balzac saw it.

And life, as this Rabelaisian Frenchman saw it, in the chaotic years of the nineteenth century, was a terrible thing except to the blind and the numbed, and to those who, like himself, possessed 'unconquerable souls.' He found two primary motives in existence. Passion and the production of children was one. He said that this was the only one. But his life and his work made it clear that there was another, and that this other was money. Money, the need of it, the spending of it, fantastic but always acute plans for getting hold of it, like that suggested in *Facino Cane*, filled his own life, and were not banished even from his love-letters. His own obsession by debts and business forced on him as a novelist a new way of looking at life, and, through him, gave another outlook to storytelling. In the older novels, Fielding's for example, rich are rich, and poor are poor, and only to be changed from one to the other by some calamity or fairy godmother of

a coincidence. People were static; unless they turned out to be Somebody's illegitimate son or rightful heir, their clothes were not of a finer cut as they grew older, and if they ate off wooden platters in the first chapter, they supped no more daintily in the last. In romantic tales and fairy stories, a hero might cut his way to fortune through dragons or piratical Turks; in the rogue novels he might swindle a dinner, and after long switchbacking between twopence and nothing, happen by accident upon a competence; he never, before Balzac took him in hand, went grimly at life, closing his heart, concentrating his energies, compelling even love to help him in his steady climb from poverty to opulence. He left that to the villain, and the storyteller took care that the villain eventually got his deserts. The older novelists were vastly interested in the progress of a love-affair; Balzac looks kindly at that, but his real interest is in the progress of a financial superman. The wealth and poverty of Balzac's characters is the quality that makes or breaks them. The mainspring of their actions is the desire of getting on in life. What is the tragedy of Eugènie Grandet, but money? What is the tragedy of Père Goriot, but money? Eliminate wealth and poverty from either of them and they cease to exist. If old Goriot had been rich and indulgent to his daughters he would have been an estimable father; but he is poor; his daughters must be luxurious, and so he is Père Goriot. The story is that of Lear and his kingdom translated

into hundred franc notes and lacking the Cordelia. Love, Wisdom, Gentleness are inconsequent dreamers in a house of Mammon. They talk in window corners and behind curtains, ashamed of their disinterestedness, They are like the old Gods banished from the temples, whispering in secret places in the woods, and going abroad quietly in the twilight, while in the glare of noon the clanking brazen giant strides heavily across the world.

> ' And underneath his feet, all scattered lay
> Dead skulls and bones of men, whose life had gone astray.'

ARTHUR RANSOME.

THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE

To a Lord

. . . . . .

1845.

I. GILLETTE

Towards the end of the year 1612, on a cold December morning, a young man in very threadbare garments was walking up and down before the door of a house in the Rue des Grands-Augustins in Paris. When he grew tired of his irresolute to and fro—as irresolute as that of a lover who dares not to present himself before his first mistress, however facile she may be—he ended by crossing the threshold, and asked if Master François Porbus was in his rooms. Upon an affirmative reply from an old woman who was sweeping out a ground-floor apartment, the young man went slowly upstairs, stopping at every step, like a newly accredited courtier who is uneasy about his reception by the King. When he reached the top of the spiral staircase, he hesitated a while on the landing, uncertain whether or no he should use the grotesque knocker that decorated the door of the studio wherein, as he conjectured, was at that moment working Henri IV.'s painter, now thrown over for Rubens by Marie de Médicis.

The young man was feeling that profound emotion which must have stirred in the heart of many a great artist when, in the prime of his youth and his passion for Art, he first encountered a man of genius or a masterpiece. In all human sentiments there exists this primal efflorescence, engendered by a noble enthusiasm which grows ever weaker and weaker until at last joy is but a memory, and glory a lie. Among these frail emotions, none is so akin to love as the young passion of an artist beginning the exquisite torture of his glorious and lamentable career—a passion compact of boldness and timidity, of vague faith and certain discouragement. If such an one, poor in worldly gear, yet all a-bud with genius, has not thus keenly thrilled at his introduction to a master, there will be lacking some heartfelt note, some indescribable touch—a sentiment, a poetic feeling, I know not what—in all his work. There may be a few inflated blusterers who never have had any doubt about their future, but only fools will reckon them among the wise. At any rate, our young acquaintance was apparently not without true merit, if talent is to be measured by this initiatory timidity—the indefinable modesty which those whom fame awaits can throw off as soon as they come to exercise their art, just as pretty women can throw off theirs when they are in full flight of coquetry. Habitual triumph diminishes doubt—and modesty is, perhaps, a form of doubt.

Overwhelmed with distress and, now that it had come

to the point, astounded at his own presumption, the poor neophyte would never have intruded himself on the painter to whom we owe our admirable portrait of Henri IV., if chance had not now sent him a surprising helper. An old man had just come up the stairs. By the eccentricity of his dress, the magnificence of his lace lappets, and the absolute self-confidence of his demeanour, the youth divined in him either a patron or a friend of the painter; he drew back to make room on the landing, and scrutinised the new comer closely, hoping to discover in him the kindliness of the artist, or else that good-nature characteristic of those who love the arts—but instead he perceived not only something diabolical about the face but, as well, the peculiar, enigmatic quality so alluring to an artist. Imagine a bald and bulging brow, very prominent, sticking out above a little snub nose like that of Rabelais or Socrates; mocking, shrivelled lips, a short chin, haughtily lifted, and set off by a grey pointed beard, sea-green eyes which might look dimmed by age, but which, nevertheless, so brilliant were the jewel-like whites, could doubtless flash green lightning in moments of anger or enthusiasm. For the rest, the face had been singularly ravaged by the years, and still more by such thoughts as undermine both soul and body. The eyelashes were gone; and the eyebrows, above the deep sockets, were barely traceable. Set this head upon a thin and fragile body, surround it with lace of dazzling whiteness and intricate device—such device as

one sees on a fish-carver; throw over the black doublet a heavy golden chain—and you will have some idea of the personage who now loomed fantastically in the dim light of the staircase. One might have thought that a Rembrandt canvas had walked out of its frame, and was now moving noiselessly in the tenebrous atmosphere which that great painter has made his own. The old man cast a piercing glance at the young one, knocked thrice at the door, and said to a delicate-looking man of about forty, who opened it:

'Good-day, Master.'

Porbus bowed respectfully. He let our young friend in also, supposing that the visitor had brought him, and taking him all the more for granted, because the neophyte was held fast in the spell to which all born painters succumb at their first sight of a studio—that initiation into the material processes of art. An open window in the roof lit Master Porbus's studio. The light was concentrated on the easel, where hung a canvas as yet untouched by more than three or four white marks; the corners of the vast room were in profound darkness, but some stray reflections, amid the russet gloom, played upon the rounded parts of an old German cuirass which swung from the wall, struck with a capricious gleam the carved and polished cornice of an antique dresser loaded with curious vessels, and pricked with glittering dots the heavy tracery of some ancient gold brocade curtains, still in their worn rich folds, which were thrown here and there and used as

models for drapery. Anatomical models in plaster, fragments and torsos of antique goddesses, lovingly polished by the kisses of the ages, strewed the shelves and tables. Innumerable sketches, studies in three crayons, in sanguine, or in pen-and-ink, covered the walls to the very ceiling. Boxes of colours, bottles of oil and of essence, overturned stools, left but a narrow path to the place where the ring of light was thrown from the high window. Its beams fell full upon the pale face of Porbus and the ivory-like pate of his strange visitor. The young man's attention was soon wholly arrested by a picture which even in that troubled and revolutionary age, had already become famous, so much so as to be the object of many visits from some of those steadfast enthusiasts who keep the Sacred Fire alive for us in evil days. This fine piece represented a *Marie Égyptienne* preparing to pay for her transit across the water. It was a masterpiece, painted for Marie de Médicis, and sold by her in the days of her distress.

'I like your saint,' said the old man to Porbus, 'and I would pay you ten golden crowns above the Queen's price for it; but get in *her* way—devil take me, no!'

'You approve of it, then?'

'H'm h'm!' said the other, 'approve of it . . . yes and no. The good lady is fairly well put together, but she's not alive. You fellows think you've done the whole trick when you've drawn a form correctly and set everything in its right anatomical place! Then you colour it up with a flesh-tone that's sitting ready-

made on your palette, taking care to keep one side darker than the other; and because you glance now and again at a naked woman standing on a table, you think you 've copied Nature, you imagine you 're painters and have found out all God's secrets! . . . P-r-r! Great poets aren't made by knowing all about syntax and avoiding grammatical mistakes. Just look at your saint, Porbus. At first sight, she seems admirable; but then one looks again, and behold! she 's fast stuck to the back of the canvas — you couldn't possibly walk round her body. She 's a silhouette with only one face, she 's a canvas apparition, she 's an image that can't stir, that can't move. I feel no air between that arm and the field you 've painted; space and depth are out of it—oh, it 's quite correct in perspective, and the gradation of tone is closely observed, but for all your laudable efforts, nothing will make me believe that that handsome body is warmed by the breath of life. It seems to me that if I put my hand on that admirably rounded neck, I should find it as cold as marble. No, my friend! the blood isn't coursing under that ivory skin, life isn't swelling with its crimson flood those veins, those fibres, so cunningly interlaced beneath the warm transparence of the temples and the breast. One place may palpitate—another doesn't; life and death are fighting for every detail: here, it 's a woman; there, a statue; somewhere else, a corpse. Your creation is incomplete. You haven't succeeded in breathing more than a part of your soul into your

cherished work. The torch of Prometheus went out more than once in your hands—ever so many places in your picture are quite untouched by the celestial flame.'

'But how has it happened, dear Master?' Porbus answered respectfully, though the young stranger had great difficulty in keeping his hands off the little old man.

'Ah, there you are!' he now replied. 'It 's because you 've hovered irresolutely between two systems—between drawing and painting—between the phlegmatic meticulosity, the stiff precision of the old German masters, and the glowing ardour, the felicitous fecundity of the Italians. You tried to imitate at one and the same moment Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Dürer and Paul Veronese. Undoubtedly a fine ambition! But behold the result. You have neither the rigid charm of the plain statement, nor the illusive magic of *chiaroscuro*. Here, like a fusing bronze that bursts its mould, Titian's rich golden colour smashes to bits the meagre Albrecht Dürer-line within which you 've tried to confine it. But here again, the line has held firm and pent up the magnificent overflowings of those splendid Venetian colours. And so your figure is neither consummately drawn, nor consummately painted; but shows in every part the marks of your unfortunate irresolution. If you didn't feel yourself capable of fusing the rival methods in the fire of your genius, you ought to have plumped boldly for one or the other,

thus obtaining that unity which simulates one of the aspects of life. You 're truthful only in your middles, so to speak; your contours are false—they neither lose themselves nor suggest anything behind them. There 's truth here,' he continued, pointing to the saint's breast . . . 'and here,' indicating the outline of the shoulder. 'But there,' he added, returning to the neck, 'all is wrong. Well, we 'd best analyse no more; it would drive you to despair.'

The old man sat down on a stool, took his head between his hands, and fell silent.

'Master,' said Porbus, 'I studied that neck very carefully in the nude; but, unfortunately for us, Nature sometimes has effects which seem fantastic on canvas——'

'The mission of Art is not to copy Nature, but to express her! You 're not a wretched copyist—you 're a poet!' cried the old man eagerly, cutting Porbus short with a despotic gesture. 'A sculptor isn't a sculptor because he runs a woman's form into a cast, is he? If you think so, try to cast your mistress's hand, and set it up in front of you—what will you see? A horrible lump of dead flesh, utterly unlike the original; you will be forced to use the chisel of the man who, without exactly copying you the thing, will give you its movement and its life. We have to catch the spirit, the soul, the physiognomy of things and beings. Effects! effects! they 're the accidents of life, not life itself. A hand—since I 've taken that as my text—a

hand isn't merely a thing that belongs to a body; it expresses and develops a thought, and that thought we've got to capture and render. Neither the painter nor the poet nor the sculptor may separate the effect from the cause—the two are for ever indissoluble. And that's where the tussle comes in! Some painters triumph by instinct without knowing this canon of art. You draw a woman, but you don't see her! That is not the way to force Nature's shrine. Your hand unconsciously reproduces the model you copied when a pupil. You don't penetrate far enough into the inwardness of form, you don't pursue it lovingly into its details, its evasions. Beauty is a stern, exacting thing that doesn't easily accord itself—you must await its chosen hours, watch it, hold it, and clasp it closely to you, before you can force it to yield itself. Form is a Proteus much more elusive and much more cunning than the Proteus of fable; only after long combat can you make it reveal itself to you as it really is. But no! you fellows are content with the first show it chooses to put up, or, at the very most, with the second or the third—the battle's not won like that! The Unconquerables are not taken in by all these subterfuges—they persevere, persevere, till Nature's forced to show herself in her nudity, in the very essence of her. That's what Raphael did,' said the old man, taking off his velvet cap to express his respect for the King of Art; 'his great superiority arises from that intimate perception which, in him, seems seeking to break through the form. Form, in his figures, is what

it is in real life—an interpreter, ready to communicate to us ideas, sensations, a whole vast system of poetry. Every figure is a world—the portrait of a model seen in a sublime vision, coloured by light, described by an inward voice, laid bare by a celestial finger pointing, through the whole of the life lived, to the sources of expression. You dress your women in handsome garments of flesh, handsome draperies of hair—but where is the blood which makes them calm or passionate, or indeed makes them anything at all? Your saint is a dark woman, my poor Porbus—but you 've painted a blonde all the same! Your figures, then, are simply poor, coloured phantoms; you present such stuff to us, and call it Painting and Art! Because you 've made something which is more like a woman than it 's like a house, you imagine you 've hit the mark; and, much puffed-up at being no longer obliged to write *currus venustus* or *pulcher homo* at the side, as the primitive painters did, you conceive yourselves to be wonderful artists. But you haven't got there yet, my fine fellows! you 'll have to use up a lot of pencils, you 'll have to cover a lot of canvases, before you 're anywhere near it! Undoubtedly, a woman carries her head like that, holds up her skirt like that; her eyes languish and melt with just such a sweet, resigned expression, the lashes' shadow trembles on her cheek—very like, very like! It 's that—yet it 's not that. And what 's wanting? A nothing—but that nothing is all. You have the show of life, but you haven't got its overflow, its running-over,

that ineffable something which may for all I know be the soul, floating in vapour about its envelope—in short, you haven't got that flower of life which Titian and Raphael somehow seized hold of. Any one starting from the point you 've reached, would probably do excellent work; but you all get tired so soon. The vulgar admire; the true connoisseur smiles. . . . O Mabuse, O my master!' added this amazing personage, 'you 're a thief, you 've carried vitality off with you! . . . For all that, though,' he resumed, 'this picture 's better than that rascally Rubens's stuff, with his mountains of Flemish meat dabbed with vermilion, his cataracts of red hair, and his bluster of colours. At the worst, there are colour, feeling, and drawing—the three essentials of Art—in your picture.'

'But this saint is sublime, old man!' the young stranger loudly exclaimed, issuing from a profound reverie. 'Those two figures—the saint and the boatman—have a subtlety unknown to the Italian painters; I can't think of one of them who could have invented the indecision of that boatman.'

'Did this eccentric young person come with you?' asked Porbus of the old man.

'Ah, master! forgive my boldness,' replied the blushing neophyte. 'I am quite an obscure person, a dauber by instinct, and but lately arrived in this town, which is the fount of all knowledge.'

'To work, then!' answered Porbus, giving him a bit of red chalk and a sheet of paper.

The stranger executed a swift and clever copy of the *Marie.*

'Oh, oh!' cried the old man. 'What's your name?'

The youth wrote at the bottom, 'Nicolas Poussin.'

'It's not bad for a beginner,' said the odd creature who had been holding forth so tumultuously. 'I see that one can talk painting before you. I don't blame you for having admired Porbus's saint. It's an accepted masterpiece, and only those who are profoundly initiate in Art can see where it falls short. But, since you're worthy of the lesson and capable of understanding it, I'm going to show how little is wanting to its real completion. Now, be all eyes and all attention, for such an opportunity may never occur again. Your palette, Porbus!'

Porbus brought palette and brushes. The little old man turned back his sleeves with a sharp convulsive gesture, stuck his thumb in the palette—loaded with an immense variety of tones—which Porbus held to him, tore, rather than took, from the same hands a fistful of many-sized brushes, while his pointed beard moved suddenly in violent jerks like those produced by an attack of amorous passion. As he charged his brush with colour, he growled between his teeth:

'These tones are only fit to throw out of window after the man who composed them, they're so disgustingly crude and false! How could any one paint with this sort of thing!'

Then with feverish vivacity he dipped the point of

the brush in the different mounds of colour, running through the entire gamut of them more rapidly than a cathedral organist runs through the full extent of his diapason in the *O Filii* at Easter.

Porbus and Poussin stood motionless on either side of the canvas, rapt in eager contemplation.

'Do you see, young man,' said the other, working undeviatingly, 'do you see how, by means of three or four touches and a little bluish glaze, one can cause the air to circulate round the head of this poor saint, who must have been gasping and choking in that heavy atmosphere? See how this drapery floats now, and how one feels that it's the breeze which is lifting it! Formerly it looked like starched linen, tightly pinned up. Do you notice how well the satin sheen I've just laid on the bosom renders the slippery suppleness of a young girl's skin, and how this mixed russet and burnt-ochre tone warms up the ashen coldness of this great shadow wherein the blood was congealing instead of running? Young man, young man, no master could teach what I'm showing you now. Mabuse alone possessed the secret of giving life to form. Mabuse had but one pupil, and that was I. I have had none, and I am old. You are intelligent enough to divine the rest, by the various hints I've given you.'

While he spoke, the strange old man was touching every part of the canvas: here a couple of strokes, there only one, but every stroke so telling that it seemed like a new picture, a picture positively steeped

in light. He worked with so passionate an ardour that the sweat stood in pearls on his bald forehead; he did it all so rapidly, in little impatient jerky movements, that, to young Poussin, it seemed as if there were in the quaint body a demon which made fantastic use of the hands against the owner's will. The unnatural brilliancy of the eyes, the convulsions which had all the effect of a kind of resistance, made the notion plausible to a youthful fancy. The old man worked on, still talking.

'Paf! paf! paf! that's the way to cook it up, boy! . . . Come, my little touches, warm this glacial tone for me! None of your nonsense! Pon! pon! pon!' he kept it up, warming those places where he had already pointed out a lack of vitality by dispersing his colours so that they hid the disparities of temperament, and re-established the unity of tone proper to a fervid Egyptian woman. 'Look you, boy, the last stroke is the only one that counts. Porbus has given a hundred; I, only one. We get no thanks for all the rest—realise that!'

At last the demon stopped, and, turning to Porbus and Poussin, who were dumb with admiration, he said to them, 'It's not as good as my *Belle Noiseuse*; but one could sign one's name to it. Yes, I'd sign it,' he added, going to fetch a mirror, and looking at it through that. '. . . Now let us go to breakfast,' he cried. 'You must both come to my place. I have some smoked ham, some good wine, and despite the foul

times, we 'll talk painting, eh? For we 're worthy men all. . . . Here 's a little fellow,' he ended, slapping Nicolas Poussin on the shoulder, 'who has facility.'

Then, noticing the Norman's threadbare cloak, he drew a hide-purse from his belt, rummaged in it, took out two gold pieces, and showing them: 'I 'll buy your drawing,' said he.

'Take it,' said Porbus to Poussin, seeing him start and flush up, for the young adept had all the pride of poverty; 'take it; he has enough to ransom two Kings in his purse!'

Then the three went downstairs, and, talking art all the time, made their way to a handsome wooden house near the Pont St. Michel. Its ornaments—the knocker, the window-frames, the arabesques—astounded Poussin. Before he knew where he was, the embryo painter found himself in a low-ceiled room, before a good fire, near a table loaded with appetising food—and all, oh wondrous fortune! in the company of two great artists in the height of good-fellowship.

'Young man,' said Porbus, seeing him staring open-mouthed at a picture, 'don't look too hard at that, or you 'll fall into black despair.'

It was the *Adam* that Mabuse painted in order to get out of the prison where he had long been kept by his creditors; and the figure was so amazingly real that Nicolas Poussin began in that instant to understand the real sense of the old man's confused discourse. This latter was looking at the picture with an air of

satisfaction, but not of enthusiasm, and seemed to be saying, 'I 've done better than that!'

'There 's life in it,' he remarked. 'My poor master surpassed himself there; but there 's a certain lack of truthfulness at the heart of it. The man is fully alive; he 's getting up and coming towards us. But the air, the sky, the wind, all that we should breathe, see, and feel—they 're out of it. And moreover, it 's only a human man after all! Now, the one man that came straight out of the hands of God ought to have something divine about him, and that 's not there. Mabuse himself used to say so angrily, when he wasn't drunk.'

Poussin looked alternately at the old man and at Porbus with an uneasy curiosity. He approached the latter as if to ask him the name of their host; but the painter put a finger on his lips with a mysterious air, and the young man, deeply interested, kept silence, hoping that sooner or later some word would enable him to guess it, for wealth and talent were sufficiently attested by the respectful demeanour of Porbus, and the accumulation of wonders in the room. Poussin, on beholding a magnificent portrait of a woman which hung on the dark oaken wainscot, exclaimed, 'What a fine Giorgione!'

'No,' replied the old man; 'you are looking at one of my first daubs . . .'

'Jesu! Then I 'm in the abode of the god of painting,' said Poussin artlessly.

The other smiled as one long since accustomed to the eulogy.

'Master Frenhofer,' said Porbus, 'couldn't you send for a little of your good Rhine-wine for me?'

'Two pipes!' answered the old man. 'One in acknowledgment of the pleasure I enjoyed this morning when looking at your pretty sinner, and the other as friendship's offering.'

'Ah! if I wasn't for ever ailing,' replied Porbus, 'and if you would but let me see your *Belle Noiseuse*, I might paint a picture tall and broad and deep, where the figures should be all life-size.'

'Show my work!' cried the old man, deeply moved. 'No, no! I must bring it to perfection first. Yesterday, towards evening, I thought I *had* finished. Her eyes seemed to me to float, her flesh to stir. The tresses of her hair moved. She was breathing! . . . But although I've discovered how to render on a flat canvas the relief and the roundness of Nature—I saw my mistake in the morning light, all the same. . . . Ah! to arrive at that glorious result, I have studied thoroughly the great masters of colouring, I've analysed and lifted, layer by layer, the pictures of Titian, the King of Light; like that sovereign artist, I've sketched my figure in light tone with a rich and supple brush—for shadow is but an accident, remember that, boy! . . . Then I went over my work again, and by means of half-tones and glazes, which I made ever less and less transparent, I found I was able to render the most unremitting

shadows, yes! even to the very pitchiest of blacks; for the shadows of ordinary painters are of another nature altogether from their high lights—they 're wood, brass, anything you like but flesh in shadow. One feels that if their figure should move about, the darker places would not clear up, would not become luminous. I 've avoided that error, into which many of the most illustrious have fallen; in my pictures, the whiteness shows under the opacity of the lustiest shadow. I 'm not like that sort of ass who thinks he can draw correctly because he carefully pares off his touches; I don't make a hard line round my form nor display every little anatomical detail—the human body isn't an affair of outlines. There 's where the sculptors get nearer to truth than we can. Nature is a succession of involuted curves. Strictly speaking, there's no such thing as drawing! . . . Don't laugh, young man! That may sound crazy to you now, but some day you 'll know what it means. . . . The line is the medium whereby man perceives the effect of light upon objects; but there are no lines in Nature, for Nature is the totality of things: it 's by modelling that one draws, that is to say, detaches things from their environment; the distribution of light is the only means whereby we see a body! And so I haven't fixed the lineaments, but spread over the contours a veil of warm, light half-tones, in such a way that one could not possibly put one's finger on the place where they melt into the background. At close quarters, this method looks woolly and seems wanting in

precision; but at a little distance, it consolidates, harmonises, stands out—the body seems ready to turn round, the forms project themselves, one feels the air circulating everywhere. However, I am not satisfied yet; I have my doubts. Perhaps one should never draw a single stroke; perhaps one should attack a figure from the centre, concentrating one's self at first upon the high-lights, and then going on to the darkest portions. Isn't it thus that the sun works—the sun, that godlike painter of the universe? O Nature, Nature, where is the man who has captured thee in thy flight! Well! excess of science, like excess of ignorance, ends in negation. I am sceptical of my work!'

He paused, then resumed: 'I have been at it ten years, young man; but what are ten short years when one's having a tussle with Nature? We don't know how long our lord Pygmalion took to make the only statue that has ever walked!'

The old man fell into a deep reverie; with fixed eyes, he sat playing mechanically with his knife.

'He's talking to his *famulus* now,' said Porbus in a low voice.

At these words, Nicolas Poussin realised that he was under the spell of an artist's inexplicable curiosity. The old man with his pale eyes, thus fixed in blank absorption—already superhuman enough in the boy's fancy—now seemed like some fantastic genie from an unknown world. He awakened an infinity of confused ideas in the mind. This sort of fascination is a moral phenomenon

which one can no more define than one can put into words the emotion excited by a song which brings his country back into an exile's heart. The disdain which this old man affected for the finest efforts of Art, his wealth, his odd ways, the deference which Porbus showed him, the work which was kept such a secret and for so long—that work of such infinite patience, and doubtless of genius as well, if one were to judge by the *Tête de Vierge* which young Poussin had so frankly admired, and which, beautiful even in juxtaposition with the *Adam* of Mabuse, was in the true imperial manner of a prince of Art—everything about him was beyond the limits of human nature. The clearest, most perceptible impression left upon the eager imagination of Nicolas Poussin by this supernatural being, was that of a perfect type of the artistic temperament—that wild thing to which so much power is given, and which but too often abuses it, dragging cold reason, and the respectable citizen, and even some real lovers of Art, through rocky path after rocky path, where there is nothing for them; but where, ever madder in caprice, this white-winged wanton discovers epics, ancient castles, masterpieces. A mocking creature and a kindly, and a prolific, and a barren! . . . Thus, for enthusiastic Poussin, the old man had been suddenly transfigured, as it were, into Art herself—Art with her secrets, her ardours, and her reveries.

'Yes, my dear Porbus,' began Frenhofer again; 'I have never yet encountered an irreproachable woman, a body whose contours were of perfect beauty, and whose

fleshtints. . . . But where *does* she exist,' he interrupted himself with '—that undiscoverable Venus of the ancients, so long sought, of whose loveliness we can find no more than a few traces? Oh! to see once, were it but for a moment, Nature in her divinity, her perfection,—the Ideal, in a word!—I would give my entire fortune . . . Yea! I would seek thee in thy Limbo, thou celestial beauty! Like Orpheus, I would go down into the Hell of Art, and bring back Life with me.'

'We may take ourselves off,' said Porbus to Poussin; 'he neither sees nor hears us now.'

'Let us go to his studio,' suggested the wondering youth.

'Oh! the old fox has that safe and fast. His treasures are too well guarded—we could never get at them. I have not waited for your suggestion and your whim before making an assault upon the mystery!'

'Then there is a mystery?'

'Yes,' replied Porbus. 'Old Frenhofer is the only pupil that Mabuse would ever take. Frenhofer became his friend, his saviour, his father; he sacrificed the greater part of his treasures to satisfy the passions of Mabuse, and in exchange, Mabuse bequeathed him the secret of 'relief,' the power of giving to figures that extraordinary vitality, that flower of life, which is our eternal despair, but which he could get so marvellously that one day, having sold and drunk the flowered damask which he was to wear at the entry of Charles-

Quint, he accompanied his master in a dress of paper painted to look like it. The Emperor was amazed at the peculiar splendour of the stuff which Mabuse wore, and, wishing to compliment the old drunkard's patron upon it, he discovered the cheat. Frenhofer is an impassioned lover of our Art, and sees further and deeper than other painters. He has pondered profoundly on colours, on the absolute truth of line; but, through his very research itself, he has come actually to disbelieve in its object. In his moments of despair, he maintains that drawing does not exist, and that one can produce nothing but geometrical figures by means of strokes—which is on the hither side of truth, since, with a stroke and the charcoal (which being black is not a colour), one *can* make a figure, thus proving that our Art is, like Nature, composed of an infinite number of elements. Drawing produces a skeleton, colour is that skeleton's life; but the life without the skeleton is a thing more incomplete than is the skeleton without the life. In the end, there's something truer than any of that—'tis that practice and observation are everything with a painter, and that, if reason and poetry are to go wrangling with the brushes, one will arrive at being a sceptic like this old fellow, who's as much of a madman as of a painter. He is a sublime artist, but he had the misfortune to be born rich, which has permitted him to fool about—don't imitate him in that! Work! Artists should think only with their brushes.'

'We'll get in somehow!' cried Poussin, who was no

longer listening to Porbus, but arranging everything in imagination just as he wanted it to be.

Porbus smiled at the young stranger's enthusiasm, and departed, inviting him to come and see him.

Nicolas Poussin walked slowly back towards the Rue de la Harpe, and, in his preoccupation. went past his own modest lodging. Then, anxiously and eagerly climbing the wretched stair, he reached an upper room tucked right under a wooden-fronted roof—that rustic and graceful feature of so many an old Paris house. Near the one dim window of this apartment, sat a young girl, who, as the latch rattled, sprang up with loving impulse: she had recognised the painter's hand so soon as he touched it.

'What is the matter?' she exclaimed.

'It 's . . . it 's—oh!' he cried, breathless with joy, 'how I have felt I was a painter! I had my doubts before, but this morning I believed in myself! I could be a great man! O Gillette, we 'll be rich and we 'll be happy. These brushes are full of gold.' . . . But he stopped suddenly. His grave, strong young face lost its radiance as he compared the immensity of his hopes with the mediocrity of his resources. The walls were covered with ordinary sheets of paper all scribbled over with crayon drawings. He possessed only four real canvases. Colours were then very costly, and the poor young man had often gazed at an almost empty palette. But for all his poverty, he possessed and displayed the richest treasures of the heart, as well as the superabund-

ance of a consuming genius. He had been brought to Paris by an aristocratic friend, or perhaps by his own talent; and quickly had encountered there a mistress —one of those noble and generous souls who can live and suffer with a great man, wedding his troubles and training herself to understand his caprices; as valiant for poverty and for love, as other women are for luxury and heartless show. Gillette's hovering smile irradiated the garret like the very sun himself. And the sun did not always shine, but she was always there—wrapt up in her passion, tenacious of her joy and of her sufferings, consoling the genius which was fulfilling itself in love before it entered into its kingdom of Art.

'Listen, Gillette—come here!'

The obedient, happy girl flew to his arms. She sat upon his knee, all grace and beauty, fair as an April day, rich in every womanly charm, and enhancing each one with the lustre of an ardent spirit.

'O God!' the boy cried, 'I can never dare to tell her——'

'A secret?' she exclaimed. 'I must know it!'

Poussin was lost in dreams.

'Do tell me.'

'Gillette—poor darling! . . .'

'Oh, you want me to do something for you?'

'Yes.'

'If it's to pose for you again as I did the other day,' she said with a little resentful look, 'I never will again—for when I'm doing it, your eyes don't say

things to me any more. You 're not thinking of me at all, and yet you 're looking at me——'

'Would you rather see me copying another woman?'

'I might,' answered she, 'if she was very ugly.'

'Well,' resumed Poussin gravely, 'supposing that for the sake of my future fame, supposing that to make me a great painter, you had to go and pose for some one else?'

'You can put me to the test,' she replied. 'You know very well I wouldn't go.'

Poussin's head sank on his breast, as does his who breaks down beneath joy or grief.

'Listen,' the girl said, pulling the sleeve of his worn doublet. 'I have often told you, Nick, that I 'd give up my life for you, but I never promised to give up my love, while I am alive.'

'To give up your love?' cried the young artist.

'If I showed myself like that to another man, you wouldn't love me any more; and I shouldn't feel that I was worthy of you, either. To obey your caprices, that 's the simple, natural thing; for, even against my own wish, I 'm glad and proud to do your dear bidding. But for another man—oh, shame!'

'Forgive me, my Gillette,' he cried, suddenly kneeling before her. 'I had rather be loved than be famous. You are dearer to me than fortune and renown. Here! I 'll throw away my brushes, I 'll burn my canvases. I was wrong: my vocation is to love you. I 'm not a painter, I 'm a lover. Perish Art and all her secrets!'

She gazed at him in admiring delight. She felt like a queen, she knew instinctively that the arts were being forgotten for her, nay! were flung at her feet like a grain of incense!

'And yet he 's only an old man,' began Poussin again. 'He won't see anything in you but the female form—and yours is so faultless!'

'One must love, indeed!' cried she, ready to sacrifice her loving scruples, to reward her lover for all his sacrifices. 'But,' she added, 'it will be the destruction of me. Ah! to ruin myself for you—that would be very beautiful! But you will forget me . . . Oh! why, why did you think of this thing?'

'I thought of it, and I love you,' he said with a sort of contrition. 'Am I really such an infamous wretch, I wonder?'

'Let us consult Father Hardouin,' suggested she.

'No, no; let it be a secret between us two.'

'Well, I 'll go; but you mustn't be there,' she said. 'You must stay outside the door, and have your dagger ready—and if I scream, rush in and kill the painter.'

Blind to all but his art, Poussin clasped Gillette in his arms.

'He loves me no more!' thought she, when she was alone again.

Already she was repenting her decision. But she was presently seized by a more terrible pang than that of repentance; she struggled with a horrible thought.

She felt that already she loved the artist less—because he had forfeited a little of her respect.

II. CATHERINE LESCAULT

THREE months after the meeting of Poussin and Porbus, the latter went to see Master Frenhofer. The old man was just then a prey to one of those profound and unreasoned discouragements whose cause lies, according to the mathematicians of medicine, in a poor digestion, in the direction of the wind, or else in the heat or some other hypochondriacal rubbish; while, according to the spiritualists, it arises from the imperfection of our moral nature. Our old gentleman was, in plain fact, utterly worn out by his efforts to get his mysterious picture finished. He was sitting languidly in a vast seat of carved oak, upholstered in black leather; without altering his listless attitude, he cast an ineffably weary glance at Porbus.

'Well, master,' said this latter, 'did that ultramarine you went all the way to Bruges for, turn out a failure? Or have you found it impossible to grind our new white? Or is the oil bad, or are the brushes restive?'

'Alas!' cried the old man, 'I thought for a while that my work was finished; but I now believe firmly that I 've made some mistakes in detail, and I shan't be easy till I 've dissipated my doubts. I 'm making up my mind to travel; and I shall go to Turkey, Greece,

Asia, to look for a model and compare my picture with the different types I find. . . . And yet, maybe I really have her up there,' he went on, with a slight smile of satisfaction. 'Nature herself, I mean. Sometimes I 'm almost afraid that a breath may bring that woman to life, and that then she 'll vanish from my sight.'

And he got up suddenly, as if about to start that very instant.

'Oh, oh!' said Porbus, 'I see I 've come just in time to spare you the expense and fatigue of the voyage.'

'What do you mean?' asked Frenhofer, in surprise.

'Young Poussin is beloved by a woman whose incomparable beauty is absolutely without any imperfection whatever. But, my dear master, if he consents to lend her to you, you must at least let us see your picture.'

The old man stood motionless, in a state of utter stupefaction. 'What!' he cried at last most mournfully, 'show my creature, my spouse? rend the veil which I have chastely thrown over my bliss? 'Twould be a hideous prostitution! Here 's ten years that I 've been living with that woman; she 's mine, mine alone, she loves me. Hasn't she smiled at me with every brush-mark I put on her? Why! she has a soul—the soul that I 've given her. She would blush if other eyes than mine were to behold her. Show her! but where 's the husband, the lover, who 's vile enough to bring his woman to dishonour? When you paint a picture for the Court, you don't put your whole soul into it—you

sell mere coloured mannikins to your courtiers. *My* painting is not a painting—it 's a sentiment, a passion! Born in my studio, she shall stay there—a virgin; she shall leave it only when she 's fully clothed. Poetry and women give themselves in their nudity to their lovers alone! Do we possess Raphael's model, or Ariosto's Angelica, or Dante's Beatrice? Not we! We see only the shapes of them. Well, the thing I keep under bolt and bar up there is an exception in our art. It 's not a picture—it 's a woman! a woman with whom I weep, laugh, talk, and think. Do you suppose I can cast off a bliss that 's lasted ten years, as one casts off a cloak—that, all in a minute, I can cease to be father, lover, and god? The woman there is not a creature, but a creation. Let your young man come along, and I 'll give him my treasures—my Correggios, my Michael Angelos, my Titians; I 'll kiss his footsteps in the dust—but make him my rival? 'twould be infamy! Ah, I 'm more lover even than painter. Yes—I shall have the fortitude to burn my *Belle Noiseuse* when my last moment comes; but expose her to the gaze of a man, a young man, a painter—no, no! If any one should pollute her with a look, I 'd kill him next day! I 'd kill you on the instant, you who are my friend, if you did not do homage to her on your knees! And now—do you still imagine that I 'll subject my idol to the frozen stares, the inane criticisms of idiots? Ah, love is a mystery; it's only in the very core of our hearts that we really live at all, and all is lost when a man

can say, even to his friend, "That 's the woman I love!"'

The old man seemed to have grown young again; his eyes were flashing, his pale cheeks were touched with vivid colour, his hands were trembling. Porbus, astonished at the passionate vehemence with which he had spoken, was puzzled how to respond to a feeling so abnormal and so intense. Was Frenhofer a rational being, or a madman? Was he now enthralled by an artist's fantasy, or did the ideas he had expressed proceed from that singular fanaticism which is produced in us by the long process of generation necessary to a great work of art? Could one ever hope to persuade such a strange passion to any sort of compromise?

Possessed by all these thoughts, Porbus said to the old man, 'But isn't it woman for woman? Won't Poussin be yielding up his mistress to your gaze?'

'What sort of a mistress?' rejoined Frenhofer. 'She 'll betray him sooner or later. Mine will be always faithful!'

'Well,' answered Porbus, 'we 'll talk of it no more. But before you find, even in Asia, a woman as beautiful, as faultless as she of whom I speak, you 'll die—and leave your picture unfinished.'

'Oh, it is finished!' said Frenhofer. 'Any one looking at it would think he saw a real woman lying on a velvet couch, under curtains. Near her a golden tripod is breathing forth perfume. You would want to take hold of the tassel of the curtain-bands; you would

believe you were seeing the very bosom of Catherine Lescault—a beautiful courtesan who was called *La Belle Noiseuse*—and watching its very rise and fall. . . . And yet, I wish I were quite sure——'

'Then go to Asia,' said Porbus, perceiving a sort of hesitation in Frenhofer's gaze; and with that, he went towards the door.

Just at that moment Gillette and Nicolas Poussin arrived at the house. The girl was on the threshold, when suddenly she dropped Poussin's arm, and recoiled as though she had been seized by some swift foreboding.

'Why do I come hither — what should I do here?' she asked her lover earnestly, with a sombre gaze.

'Gillette, I have left it in your hands—I will obey you wholly. You are my conscience; you shall be my glory. Come home—I shall be happier, perhaps, than if you . . .'

'And am I mistress of myself, do you suppose, when you talk to me like that? Ah no! I turn into a child again. . . . Let us go in,' she added, evidently with a great effort; 'and though our love be destroyed, and though I fill my own heart with a long regret, your celebrity will be the price of my obedience to your will. Yes, we'll go in; and I shall live again—for ever!—as a memory on your palette.'

As they opened the door, the lovers encountered Porbus, who, amazed at Gillette's beauty, caught her

all trembling and tearful as she was, and led her to the old man.

'Look!' he cried; 'isn't she worth all the masterpieces in the universe?'

Frenhofer started. There stood Gillette, in a childish, artless attitude—an innocent, frightened Georgian maiden, dragged by brigands before a slave-merchant, might so stand and so look. She was blushing deeply, her eyes were downcast, her hands hung by her sides, she seemed quite helpless, and her tears protested, as it were, against this affront to her modesty. Poussin, repenting him that he had brought his treasure from its hiding-place, bitterly cursed himself. Once more he was the lover rather than the artist; his heart sickened as he saw the old man's eye light up—that painter's eye which, as it were, unclothed her, divining unerringly the most intimate secrets of her form. Poussin knew then in all its ferocity the natural jealousy of true passion.

'Let us go, Gillette!' he cried.

At that cry, at that accent, his happy mistress looked up, read his face, and rushed into his arms.

'Ah, then you love me!' she sobbed. She had been strong enough to say nothing of her anguish, but she had not strength to hide her joy.

'Oh! leave her to me for a moment!' said the old painter; 'and then—yes, I consent!—you shall compare her with my Catherine.'

There was love in Frenhofer's cry, too. He seemed

to have a personal feeling about his painted woman—something almost like rivalry, for he appeared to be, so to speak, exulting beforehand in the victory that his lovely creation was to win over a young, living girl.

'Don't let him go back on his word,' cried Porbus, slapping Poussin's shoulder. 'The harvest of love is fleeting—that of Art immortal!'

'But,' said Gillette, looking searchingly at them both, 'am I not something more than a mere woman—for him?'

She lifted her head haughtily; but when, after an indignant glance at Frenhofer, she looked at her lover again and found him staring at the portrait which formerly he had mistaken for a Giorgione: 'Ah!' she exclaimed. 'Let us go up to the other room. . . . He has never looked at me like that.'

'Old man,' said Poussin, roused by Gillette's voice, 'do you see this sword? If this damsel utters one word of complaint, I'll plunge it in your heart; I'll burn your house down—not one soul shall escape. Do you understand?'

His face was dark, his voice terrible. This attitude (and better still, his threatening gesture) consoled Gillette; she could almost pardon him for having sacrificed her to his Art and his glorious future. . . . Porbus and Poussin waited outside the door, exchanging silent glances. At first, the painter of the *Marie Egyptienne* uttered a few exclamations: 'Ah, she's undressing! He's told her to go under the full light! He's com-

paring them now!' but Poussin's heart-broken expression quickly silenced him, for though old painters forget these little scruples in the service of Art, Porbus was touched by the lover's freshness and the pathos of the situation. The boy had his hand on his dagger, his ear was glued to the door. The two, standing there in the gloom, looked like conspirators awaiting the hour to strike a tyrant down.

'Come in, come in!' said the old man at last, beaming with joy. 'My picture is perfect—I can show it proudly now. Never will painter, brushes, colours, canvas, and light combine to put together a rival to *Catherine Lescault*, the beautiful courtesan!'

Possessed by eager curiosity, Porbus and Poussin rushed to the centre of a vast, dusty, and very disorderly studio, with a few pictures hanging on its walls. They paused at first before a life-size figure of a woman, half-naked, which had arrested their admiring attention.

'Oh, don't waste time over that!' said Frenhofer; 'that's a canvas I daubed as a study of a pose—it's not worth looking at. Those are my mistakes!' he went on, pointing to the exquisite things which hung on the walls around them.

On hearing this, Porbus and Poussin, overwhelmed by such disdain for such productions, looked about eagerly for the promised portrait, but could not see it.

Why, here it is!' said the old man. His hair was rumpled, his face was flushed with unnatural excitement, his eyes were sparkling, and he was panting like a

young man drunk with passion . . . 'Ha, ha!' he cried, 'you didn't expect such perfection, did you? You're standing before a woman, and you're looking for a mere picture! There's such depth in this canvas, the atmosphere is so truthful, that you positively can't distinguish it from the atmosphere around you. Where is artifice? Gone, vanished—this is the very form itself of a young girl. Haven't I got the colour, the very soul of the line which seems to bound the body? Why, it's the same phenomenon, isn't it? that we see every day —of objects floating in atmosphere as a fish floats in water. Look how the contours are detached from the background! Aren't you convinced that you could pass your hand behind that back? That's why, for seven whole years, I've studied the effects of the coupling of light and objects—just to get that. And the hair—isn't it drenched with sunshine? Did she breathe just then? I believe she did! . . . And look at that bosom! Who wouldn't kneel and worship it? Why, the flesh moves as you look! She's going to stand up —wait!'

'Do you perceive anything?' asked Poussin of Porbus.

'No. . . . Do you?'

'Nothing.'

The two painters left the old man to his rapture, and looked to see whether the light, falling full on the canvas he was showing them, might not possibly be neutralising all the effects. They stood on the right,

on the left, and straight in front of the picture, now stooping, now standing erect. . . .

'Yes, yes—it is really a canvas,' said Frenhofer, mistaking the motive of this minute scrutiny. 'Look! here's the stretcher, here's the easel; and why! here are my colours, my brushes—' He seized a brush, and held it to them with a boyish gesture.

'The old rogue is making fun of us,' said Poussin, returning to the supposed picture. 'All I can see there is a mass of confused colour, imprisoned in a multitude of extraordinary lines—like a sort of wall of painting.'

'No, we're wrong—look!' cried Porbus.

Drawing nearer, they perceived in one corner of the canvas the tip of a bare foot. This projected from the chaos of tints, of tones, of faintest gradations, which made up something resembling a shapeless cloud. 'Twas an enchanting foot—a living foot! they stood struck dumb with admiration before the one fragment which had escaped from that slow, relentless, incredible destruction. The foot had the same effect as has the torso of some Parian-marble Venus emerging from the litter of a city that has been burned to the ground.

'There's a woman underneath!' cried Porbus, pointing out to Poussin the layers of colour which the old painter had heaped up in the belief that he was bringing his picture to perfection.

The two artists turned swiftly to Frenhofer. They

were beginning to have some idea, however vague, of the state of rapture in which he lived and moved.

'He is not joking,' said Porbus.

'Yes, my friend,' said the old man, coming to himself again, 'one must have faith—faith in Art—and one must live long and long with one's work before one can produce a creation like that! Some of those shadows gave me a desperate bout of it. Look now, there on the cheek, under the eyes, do you see a slight shade of a shade which, if you'll observe it some day in real life, I guarantee you'll judge to be untranslatable. Well, do you suppose that effect didn't cost me the devil of a time to produce? But then again, my dear Porbus, look carefully into my method, and you'll understand better what I once said about the way to treat your object and its contours. Look at the light on the bosom, and observe how, by successive touches and by putting lots of paint on my high lights, I've succeeded in getting hold of the very gleam itself and combining it with the dazzling whiteness of the places it lights up; and then again, by a reversal of the process, by toning down the projections, the actual grain of the paint, see how I've caressed the contour of my figure, drowned it in half-tints till I've dismissed all suspicion of drawing or any artificial method whatever, and given it the aspect, the roundness, of Nature itself. Come nearer; then you'll see the work better. It loses, at a distance. There! now that, I consider, is very remarkable.' And

with the point of his brush, he indicated a mere plaster of light colour.

Porbus clapped him on the shoulder, and, turning to Poussin, 'Do you know, we are looking at a very great painter?' said he.

'He is even more of a poet than of a painter,' replied Poussin, gravely.

'There,' went on Porbus, touching the picture, 'there culminates our Art in this world!'

'And thence it mounts to Heaven, and loses itself,' answered Poussin.

'What joys are embodied in that bit of canvas!' cried Porbus.

The old man, rapt away, never heard them; he was smiling at his imaginary lady.

'But sooner or later he must see that there's nothing on his canvas!' Poussin exclaimed.

'Nothing on my canvas!' said Frenhofer, looking in turn at the painters and at his supposed picture.

'What have you done?' said Porbus, under his breath, to Poussin.

The old man clutched the young man's arm and said: 'You see nothing, do you? you clown, you renegade, you ninny, you'—he ended with a hideous obscenity. 'How dared you come up here, then? . . . My good Porbus,' he went on, turning to the painter, 'surely you aren't making game of me, too? Tell me— I'm your friend; say, have I really spoilt my picture?'

Porbus hesitated, afraid to speak; but the anxiety de-

picted on the old man's white face was so intense, that he pointed to the canvas, saying, 'Look!'

Frenhofer looked at his picture for a moment, and staggered. 'Nothing! nothing! And I've worked for ten years. . . .'

He sat down and wept.

'And so I'm an imbecile, a madman! I have neither talent nor capacity! I'm nothing now but a rich man like the rest—as dull as any of 'em. I've produced nothing!'

He gazed through blinding tears at his picture; then all at once rose haughtily, and flashed a look at the two painters.

'Oh, by the Blood, by the Body, by the Head of Christ! you're nothing but a pair of jealous thieves that want me to think she's ruined so that you may get her away from me! I can see her!' he cried; 'she's a beauty, she's a wonder——'

Just then, Poussin heard Gillette sobbing. She was sitting, all forgotten, in a corner.

'What's the matter, my darling?' asked the painter, instantly turning into a lover again.

'Kill me!' she wept, 'I should be a vile wretch if I loved you still, for I despise you. . . . I admire you, and you make me shudder! I love you, and I believe I already detest you!'

While Poussin was listening to Gillette, Frenhofer was covering up his picture with a green cloth, as seriously and tranquilly as a jeweller who closes his

drawers against what he supposes to be a gang of clever thieves. He cast upon the two men a profoundly sinister look, all scorn and distrust, led them silently, with convulsive rapidity, to his studio-door—then, on the threshold, spoke.

'Good-bye, my little friends.'

The tone chilled their blood. Next day, Porbus, very uneasy, returned—and learnt that Frenhofer had died in the night, after burning his pictures.

THE ATHEIST'S MASS

Doctor Bianchon—a physician to whom science owes a beautiful physiological theory, and who, though still a young man, has won himself a place among the celebrities of the Paris School, a centre of light to which all the doctors of Europe pay homage—had practised surgery before devoting himself to medicine. His early studies were directed by one of the greatest surgeons in France, the celebrated Desplein, who was regarded as a luminary of science. Even his enemies admitted that with him was buried a technical skill that he could not bequeath to any successor. Like all men of genius he left no heirs. All that was peculiarly his own he carried to the grave with him.

The glory of great surgeons is like that of actors whose work exists only so long as they live, and of whose talent no adequate idea can be formed when they are gone. Actors and surgeons, and also great singers like those artists who increase tenfold the power of music by the way in which they perform it—all these are the heroes of a moment. Desplein is a striking instance of the similarity of the destinies of such transitory geniuses. His name, yesterday so famous, to-day

almost forgotten, will live among the specialists of his own branch of science without being known beyond it.

But is not an unheard-of combination of circumstances required for the name of a learned man to pass from the domain of science into the general history of mankind? Had Desplein that universality of acquirements that makes of a man the expression, the type of a century? He was gifted with a magnificent power of diagnosis. He could see into the patient and his malady by an acquired or natural intuition, that enabled him to grasp the peculiar characteristics of the individual, and determine the precise moment, the hour, the minute, when he should operate, taking into account both atmospheric conditions and the special temperament of his patient. In order thus to be able to work hand in hand with Nature, had he studied the ceaseless union of organised and elementary substances contained in the atmosphere, or supplied by the earth to man, who absorbs and modifies them so as to derive from them an individual result? Or did he proceed by that power of deduction and analogy to which the genius of Cuvier owed so much?

However that may be, this man had made himself master of all the secrets of the body. He knew it in its past as in its future, taking the present for his point of departure. But did he embody in his own person all the science of his time, as was the case with Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle? Did he lead a whole school towards new worlds of knowledge? No. And

while it is impossible to deny to this indefatigable observer of the chemistry of the human body the possession of something like the ancient science of Magism—that is to say the knowledge of principles in combination, of the causes of life, of life as the antecedent of life, and what it will be through the action of causes preceding its existence—it must be acknowledged that all this was entirely personal to him. Isolated during his life by egotism, this egotism was the suicide of his fame. His tomb is not surmounted by a pretentious statue proclaiming to the future the mysteries that genius has unveiled for it.

But perhaps the talents of Desplein were linked with his beliefs, and therefore mortal. For him the earth's atmosphere was a kind of envelope generating all things. He regarded the earth as an egg in its shell, and unable to solve the old riddle as to whether the egg or the hen came first, he admitted neither the hen nor the egg. He believed neither in a mere animal nature giving origin to the race of man, nor in a spirit surviving him. Desplein was not in doubt. He asserted his theories. His plain open atheism was like that of many men, some of the best fellows in the world, but invincibly atheistic—atheists of a type of which religious people do not admit the existence. This opinion could hardly be otherwise with a man accustomed from his youth to dissect the highest of beings, before, during and after life, without finding therein that one soul that is so necessary to religious theories. He recognised there a

cerebral centre, a nervous centre, and a centre for the respiratory and circulatory system, and the two former so completely supplemented each other, that during the last part of his life he had the conviction that the sense of hearing was not absolutely necessary for one to hear, nor the sense of vision absolutely necessary for sight, and that the solar plexus could replace them without one being aware of the fact. Desplein, recognising these two souls in man, made it an argument for his atheism, without however assuming anything as to the belief in God. This man was said to have died in final impenitence, as many great geniuses have unfortunately died, whom may God forgive.

Great as the man was, his life had in it many 'littlenesses' (to adopt the expression used by his enemies, who were eager to diminish his fame), though it would perhaps be more fitting to call them 'apparent contradictions.' Failing to understand the motives on which high minds act, envious and stupid people at once seize hold of any surface discrepancies to base upon them an indictment, on which they straightway ask for judgment. If, after all, success crowns the methods they have attacked, and shows the co-ordination of preparation and result, all the same something will remain of these charges flung out in advance. Thus in our time Napoleon was condemned by his contemporaries for having spread the wings of the eagle towards England. They had to wait till 1822 for the explanation of 1804, and of the flat-bottomed boats of Boulogne.

In the case of Desplein, his fame and his scientific knowledge not being open to attack, his enemies found fault with his strange whims, his singular character. For he possessed in no small degree that quality which the English call 'eccentricity.' Now he would be attired with a splendour that suggested Crébillon's stately tragedy; and then he would suddenly affect a strange indifference in the matter of dress. One saw him now in a carriage, now on foot. By turns sharp-spoken and kindly; assuming an air of closeness and stinginess, but at the same time ready to put his fortune at the disposal of exiled professors of his science, who would do him the honour of accepting his help for a few days—no one ever gave occasion for more contradictory judgments. Although for the sake of obtaining a decoration that doctors were not allowed to canvass for, he was quite capable of letting a prayer-book slip out of his pocket when at court, you may take it that in his own mind he made a mockery of everything. He had a deep disdain for men, after having caught glimpses of their true character in the midst of the most solemn and the most trivial acts of their existence. In a great man all his characteristics are generally in keeping with each other. If one of these giants has more talent than wit, it is all the same true that his wit is something deeper than that of one of whom all that can be said is that 'He is a witty fellow.' Genius always implies a certain insight into the moral side of things. This insight may be applied to one special line

of thought, but one cannot see the flower without at the same time seeing the sun that produces it. The man who, hearing a diplomatist whom he was saving from death ask, 'How is the Emperor?' remarked, 'The courtier is recovering, and the man will recover with him!' was not merely a doctor or a surgeon, but was also not without a considerable amount of wit. Thus the patient, unwearying observation of mankind might do something to justify the exorbitant pretensions of Desplein, and make one admit that, as he himself believed, he was capable of winning as much distinction as a Minister of State, as he had gained as a surgeon.

Amongst the problems that the life of Desplein presented to the minds of his contemporaries, we have chosen one of the most interesting, because the key to it will be found in the ending of the story, and will serve to clear him of many stupid accusations made against him.

Among all Desplein's pupils at the hospital, Horace Bianchon was one of those to whom he was most strongly attached. Before becoming a resident student at the Hôtel Dieu, Horace Bianchon was a medical student, living in the Quartier Latin in a wretched lodging-house, known by the name of the Maison Vauquer. There the poor young fellow experienced the pressure of that acute poverty, which is a kind of crucible, whence men of great talent are expected to come forth pure and incorruptible, like a diamond that can be subjected to blows of all kinds without breaking. Though the fierce

fire of passion has been aroused, they acquire a probity that it cannot alter, and they become used to struggles that are the lot of genius, in the midst of the ceaseless toil, in which they curb desires that are not to be satisfied. Horace was an upright young man, incapable of taking any crooked course in matters where honour was involved; going straight to the point; ready to pawn his overcoat for his friends, as he was to give them his time and his long vigils. In a word Horace was one of those friends who do not trouble themselves as to what they are to receive in return for what they bestow, taking it for granted that, when it comes to their turn, they will get more than they give. Most of his friends had for him that heart-felt respect which is inspired by unostentatious worth, and many of them would have been afraid to provoke his censure. But Horace manifested these good qualities without any pedantic display. Neither a puritan nor a preacher, he would in his simplicity enforce a word of good advice with any oath, and was ready for a bit of good cheer when the occasion offered. A pleasant comrade, with no more shyness than a trooper, frank and outspoken—not as a sailor, for the sailor of to-day is a wily diplomatist—but as a fine young fellow, who has nothing in his life to be ashamed of, he went his way with head erect and with a cheerful mind. To sum it all up in one word, Horace was the Pylades of more than one Orestes, creditors nowadays playing most realistically the part of the Furies. He bore his poverty with that gaiety which is

perhaps one of the chief elements of courage, and, like all those who have nothing, he contracted very few debts. As enduring as a camel, as alert as a wild deer, he was steadfast in his ideas and in his conduct.

The happiness of Bianchon's life began on the day when the famous surgeon became acquainted with the good qualities and the defects, which, each as well as the other, make Dr. Horace Bianchon doubly dear to his friends. When the teacher of a hospital class receives a young man into his inner circle, that young man, has, as the saying goes, his foot in the stirrup. Desplein did not fail to take Bianchon with him as his assistant to wealthy houses, where nearly always a gratuity slipped into the purse of the student, and where, all unconsciously, the young provincial had revealed to him some of the mysteries of Parisian life. Desplein would have him in his study during consultations, and found work for him there. Sometimes he would send him to a watering place, as companion to a rich invalid,—in a word, he was preparing a professional connection for him. The result of all this was that after a certain time the tyrant of the operating theatre had his right-hand man. These two—one of them at the summit of professional honours and science, and in the enjoyment of an immense fortune and an equal renown, the other a modest cipher without fortune or fame—became intimate friends. The great Desplein told everything to his pupil. Bianchon came to know the mysteries of this temperament, half lion, half bull,

that in the end caused an abnormal expansion of the great man's chest and killed him by enlargement of the heart. He studied the odd whims of this busy life, the schemes of its sordid avarice, the projects of this politician disguised as a man of science. He was able to forecast the disappointments that awaited the one touch of sentiment that was buried in a heart not of stone though made to seem like stone.

One day Bianchon told Desplein that a poor water-carrier in the Quartier Saint-Jacques was suffering from a horrible illness caused by overwork and poverty. This poor native of Auvergne had only potatoes to eat during the hard winter of 1821. Desplein left all his patients. At the risk of breaking down his horse, he drove at full speed, accompanied by Bianchon, to the poor man's lodging, and himself superintended his removal to a private nursing home established by the celebrated Dubois in the Faubourg Saint-Denis. He went to attend to the man himself, and gave him, when he had recovered, money enough to buy a horse and a water-cart. The Auvergnat distinguished himself by an unconventional proceeding. One of his friends fell sick, and he at once brought him to Desplein, and said to his benefactor:—

'I would not think of allowing him to go to any one else.'

Overwhelmed with work as he was, Desplein grasped the water-carrier's hand and said to him:—

'Bring them all to me.'

He had this poor fellow from the Cantal admitted to the Hôtel Dieu, where he took the greatest care of him. Bianchon had on many occasions remarked that his chief had a particular liking for people from Auvergne, and especially for the water-carriers; but as Desplein took a kind of pride in his treatment of his poor patients at the Hôtel Dieu, his pupil did not see anything very strange in this.

One day when Bianchon was crossing the Place Saint-Sulpice he caught sight of his teacher going into the church about nine o'clock in the morning. Desplein, who at this period would not go a step without calling for his carriage, was on foot, and slipped in quietly by the side door in the Rue du Petit Lion, as if he was going into some doubtful place. The student was naturally seized by a great curiosity, for he knew the opinions of his master; so Bianchon too slipped into Saint-Sulpice and was not a little surprised to see the famous Desplein, this atheist, who thought very little of angels, as beings who give no scope for surgery, this scoffer, humbly kneeling, and where? . . . in the Lady Chapel, where he heard a mass, gave an alms for the church expenses and for the poor, and remained throughout as serious as if he were engaged in an operation.

Bianchon's astonishment knew no bounds. 'If,' he said to himself, 'I had seen him holding one of the cords of the canopy at a public procession on Corpus Christi I might just laugh at him; but at this time of

day, all alone, without any one to see him, this is certainly something to set one thinking!'

Bianchon had no wish to appear to be playing the spy on the chief surgeon of the Hôtel Dieu, so he went away. It so happened that Desplein asked him to dine with him that day, not at his house but at a restaurant. Between the cheese and the dessert Bianchon, by cleverly leading up to it, managed to say something about the mass, and spoke of it as a mummery and a farce.

'A farce,' said Desplein, 'that has cost Christendom more bloodshed than all the battles of Napoleon, all the leeches of Broussais. It is a papal invention, that only dates from the sixth century. What torrents of blood were not shed to establish the feast of Corpus Christi, by which the Court of Rome sought to mark its victory in the question of the real presence, and the schism that has troubled the church for three centuries! The wars of the Count of Toulouse and the Albigenses were the sequel of that affair. The Vaudois and the Albigenses refused to recognise the innovation.'

In a word Desplein took a pleasure in giving vent to all his atheistic ardour, and there was a torrent of Voltairian witticisms, or to describe it more accurately, a detestable imitation of the style of the *Citateur*.[1]

'Hum!' said Bianchon to himself, 'what has become of my devotee of this morning?'

[1] The *Citateur*, a now forgotten book by Pigault Lebrun, published at Paris in 1803—a kind of popular summary of current attacks on the clergy and their teachings.—*Translator*.

He kept silent. He began to doubt if it was really his chief that he had seen at Saint-Sulpice. Desplein would not have taken the trouble to lie to Bianchon. They knew each other too well. They had already exchanged ideas on points quite as serious, and discussed systems of the nature of things, exploring and dissecting them with the knives and scalpels of incredulity.

Three months went by. Bianchon took no further step in connection with the incident, though it remained graven in his memory. One day that year one of the doctors of the Hôtel Dieu took Desplein by the arm in Bianchon's presence, as if he had a question to put to him.

'Whatever do you go to Saint-Sulpice for, my dear master?' he said to him.

'To see one of the priests there, who has caries in the knee, and whom Madame the Duchess of Angoulême did me the honour to recommend to my care,' said Desplein.

The doctor was satisfied with this evasion, but not so Bianchon.

'Ah, he goes to see diseased knees in the church! Why, he went to hear mass!' said the student to himself.

Bianchon made up his mind to keep a watch on Desplein. He remembered the day, the hour, when he had caught him going into Saint-Sulpice, and he promised himself that he would be there next year on

the same day and at the same hour, to see if he would catch him again. In this case the recurring date of his devotions would give ground for a scientific investigation, for one ought not to expect to find in such a man a direct contradiction between thought and action.

Next year, on the day and at the hour, Bianchon, who by this time was no longer one of Desplein's resident students, saw the surgeon's carriage stop at the corner of the Rue de Tournon and the Rue du Petit Lion. His friend got out, passed stealthily along by the wall of Saint-Sulpice, and once more heard his mass at the Lady altar. It was indeed Desplein, the chief surgeon of the hospital, the atheist at heart, the devotee at haphazard. The problem was getting to be a puzzle. The persistence of the illustrious man of science made it all very complicated. When Desplein had gone out Bianchon went up to the sacristan, who came to do his work in the chapel, and asked him if that gentleman was a regular attendant there.

'Well, I have been here twenty years,' said the sacristan, 'and all that time M. Desplein has come four times a year to be present at this mass. He founded it.'

'A foundation made by him!' said Bianchon, as he went away. 'Well, it is more wonderful than all the mysteries.'

Some time passed by before Dr. Bianchon, although the friend of Desplein, found an opportunity to talk to

him of this singular incident in his life. Though they met in consultation or in society, it was difficult to get that moment of confidential chat alone together, when two men sit with their feet on the fender, and their heads resting on the backs of their arm-chairs, and tell each other their secrets. At last, after a lapse of seven years, and after the Revolution of 1830, when the people had stormed the Archbishop's house, when Republican zeal led them to destroy the gilded crosses that shone like rays of light above the immense sea of housetops, when unbelief side by side with revolt paraded the streets, Bianchon again came upon Desplein as he entered the church of Saint-Sulpice. The doctor followed him in, and took his place beside him, without his friend taking any notice of him, or showing the least surprise. Together they heard the mass he had founded.

'Will you tell me, my dear friend,' said Bianchon to Desplein, when they left the church, 'the reason for this monkish proceeding of yours? I have already caught you going to mass three times, you of all men! You must tell me the meaning of this mystery, and explain to me this flagrant contradiction between your opinions and your conduct. You don't believe in God and you go to mass! My dear master, you are bound to give me an answer.'

'I am like a good many devotees, men deeply religious to all appearance, but quite as much atheists as we can be, you and I.'

And then there was a torrent of epigrams referring to certain political personages, the best known of whom presents us in our own time with a new edition of the *Tartuffe* of Molière.

'I am not asking you about all that,' said Bianchon. 'But I do want to know the reason for what you have just been doing here. Why have you founded this mass?'

'My word! my dear friend,' said Desplein, 'I am on the brink of the grave, and I may just as well talk to you about the early days of my life.'

Just then Bianchon and the great man were in the Rue des Quatre Vents, one of the most horrible streets in Paris. Desplein pointed to the sixth story of one of those high, narrow-fronted houses that stand like obelisks. The outer door opens on a passage, at the end of which is a crooked stair, lighted by those small inner windows that are aptly called *jours de souffrance*.[1] It was a house with a greenish-coloured front, with a furniture dealer installed on the ground floor, and apparently a different type of wretchedness lodging in every story. As he raised his arm with a gesture that was full of energy, Desplein said to Bianchon—

'I lived up there for two years!'

[1] A pun generally evaporates and disappears in the process of translation. *Jours de souffrance* suggests 'days of endurance'; but taking *jour* in the sense of a window or opening giving light it refers here to windows on a stair or passage, getting their light not from the open air but from one of the rooms, 'borrowed lights,' as we sometimes call them.—*Translator.*

'I know that. D'Arthez used to live there. I came there nearly every day when I was quite a young fellow, and in those days we used to call it "the store bottle of great men!" Well, what comes next?'

'The mass that I have just heard is connected with events that occurred when I was living in that garret in which you tell me D'Arthez once lived, the room from the window of which there is a line hanging with clothes drying on it, just above the flower-pot. I had such a rough start in life, my dear Bianchon, that I could dispute with any one you like the palm for suffering endured here in Paris. I bore it all, hunger, thirst, want of money, lack of clothes, boots, linen—all that is hardest in poverty. I have tried to warm my frozen fingers with my breath in that "store bottle of great men," which I should like to revisit with you. As I worked in the winter a vapour would rise from my head, and I could see the steam of perspiration like we see it about the horses on a frosty day. I don't know where one finds the foothold to stand up against such a life. I was all alone, without help, without a penny to buy books or to pay the expenses of my medical education: without a friend, for my irritable, gloomy, nervous character did me harm. No one would recognise in my fits of irritation the distress, the struggles of a man who is striving to rise to the surface from his place in the very depths of the social system. But I can say to you, in whose presence I have no need to cloak myself in any way, that I had that basis of sound

ideas and impressionable feelings, which will always be part of the endowment of men strong enough to climb up to some summit, after having long plodded through the morass of misery. I could not look for any help from my family or my native place beyond the insufficient allowance that was made to me. To sum it all up, at that time my breakfast in the morning was a roll that a baker in the Rue du Petit Lion sold cheaply to me because it was from the baking of yesterday or the day before, and which I broke up into some milk; thus my morning meal did not cost me more than a penny. I dined only every second day, in a boarding-house where one could get a dinner for eightpence. Thus I spent only fourpence-halfpenny a day. You know as well as I do what care I would take of such things as clothes and boots! I am not sure that in later life we feel more trouble at the treachery of a colleague than we have felt, you and I, at discovering the mocking grimace of a boot sole that is coming away from the sewing, or at hearing the rending noise of a torn coat cuff. I drank only water. I looked at the cafés with the greatest respect. The Café Zoppi seemed to me like a promised land, where the Lucullusés of the Quartier Latin had the exclusive right of entry. "Shall I ever," I used sometimes to ask myself, "shall I ever be able to go in there to take a cup of coffee and hot milk, or to play a game of dominoes?"

'Well I brought to my work the furious energy that my poverty inspired. I tried rapidly to get a grasp of

exact knowledge so as to acquire an immense personal worth in order to deserve the position I hoped to reach in the days when I would have come forth from my nothingness. I consumed more oil than bread. The lamp that lighted me during these nights of persistent toil cost me more than my food. The struggle was long, obstinate, without encouragement. I had won no sympathy from those around me. To have friends must one not associate with other young fellows, and have a few pence to take a drink with them, and go with them wherever students are to be found? I had nothing. And no one in Paris quite realises that *nothing* is really *nothing*. If I ever had any occasion to reveal my misery I felt in my throat that nervous contraction that makes our patients sometimes imagine there is a round mass coming up the gullet into the larynx. Later on I have come across people, who, having been born in wealth and never wanted for anything, knew nothing of that problem of the Rule of Three: A young man is to a crime as a five franc piece is to the unknown quantity X. These gilded fools would say to me:—

'"But why do you get into debt? Why ever do you contract serious obligations?"

'They remind me of that princess, who, on hearing that the people were in want of bread, said:—"Why don't they buy sponge cakes?" I should like very much to see one of those rich men, who complains that I ask him for too high a fee when there has to be an

operation—yes, I should like to see him all alone in Paris, without a penny, without luggage, without a friend, without credit, and forced to work his five fingers to the bone to get a living. What would he do? Where would he go to satisfy his hunger? Bianchon, if you have sometimes seen me bitter and hard, it was because I was then thinking at once of my early troubles and of the heartlessness, the selfishness of which I have seen a thousand instances in the highest circles; or else I was thinking of the obstacles that hatred, envy, jealousy, calumny have raised up between me and success. In Paris when certain people see you ready to put your foot in the stirrup, some of them pull at the skirt of your coat, others loosen the saddle girth; this one knocks a shoe off your horse, that one steals your whip; the least treacherous of the lot is the one you see coming to fire a pistol at you point blank. You have talent enough, my dear fellow, to know soon enough the horrible, the unceasing warfare that mediocrity carries on against the man that is its superior. If one evening you lose twenty-five *louis*, next morning you will be accused of being a gambler, and your best friends will say that you have lost twenty-five thousand francs last night. If you have a headache, you will be set down as a lunatic. If you are not lively, you will be set down as unsociable. If to oppose this battalion of pygmies, you call up your own superior powers, your best friends will cry out that you wish to devour everything, that you claim to lord it and play the tyrant. In

a word your good qualities will be turned into defects, your defects will be turned into vices, and your virtues will be crimes. If you have saved some one, it will be said that you have killed him. If your patient reappears, it will be agreed that you have made sure of the present at the expense of his future; though he is not dead, he will die. If you stumble, it will be a fall! Invent anything whatever, and assert your rights, and you will be a difficult man to deal with, a sharp fellow, who does not like to see young men succeed. So, my dear friend, if I do not believe in God, I believe even less in man. Do you not recognise in me a Desplein that is quite different from the Desplein about whom every one speaks ill? But we need not dig into that heap of mud.

'Well, I was living in that house, I had to work to be ready to pass my first examination, and I had not a farthing. You know what it is! I had come to one of those crises of utter extremity when one says to oneself:—"I will enlist!" I had one hope. I was expecting from my native place a trunk full of linen, a present from some old aunts, who, knowing nothing of Paris, think about providing one with dress shirts, because they imagine that with thirty francs a month their nephew dines on ortolans. The trunk arrived while I was away at the Medical School. It had cost forty francs, carriage to be paid. The concierge of the house, a German cobbler, who lived in a loft, had paid the money and held the trunk. I took a walk in the Rue

des Fosse-Saint-Germain-des-Prés and in the Rue de l'École de Médicine, without being able to invent a stratagem, which would put the trunk in my possession, without my being obliged to pay down the forty francs, which of course I meant to pay after selling the linen. My stupidity seemed a very fair sign to me that I was fit for no vocation but surgery. My dear friend, delicately organised natures, whose powers are exercised in some higher sphere, are wanting in that spirit of intrigue, which is fertile in resources and shifts. Genius such as theirs depends on chance. They do not seek out things, they come upon them.

'At last, after dark, I went back to the house, just at the moment when my next room neighbour was coming in, a water-carrier named Bourgeat, a man from Saint-Flour in Auvergne. We knew each other in the way in which two lodgers come to know each other, when both have their rooms on the same landing, and they can hear each other going to bed, coughing, getting up, and end by becoming quite used to each other. My neighbour informed me that the landlord, to whom I owed three months' rent, had sent me notice to quit. I must clear out next day. He himself was to be evicted on account of his business. I passed the most sorrowful night of my life.

'Where was I to find a porter to remove my poor belongings, my books? How was I to pay the porter and the concierge? Where could I go? With tears in my eyes I repeated these insoluble questions, as

lunatics repeat their catchwords. I fell asleep. For the wretched there is a divine sleep full of beautiful dreams. Next morning, while I was eating my porringer full of bread crumbled into milk, Bourgeat came in, and said to me in bad French:—

'"Mister Student, I 'm a poor man, a foundling of the hospice of Saint-Flour, without father or mother, and not rich enough to marry. You are not much better off for relations, or better provided with what counts? Now, see here, I have down below a hand-cart that I have hired at a penny an hour. All our things can be packed on it. If you agree, we will look for a place where we can lodge together, since we are turned out of this. And after all it 's not the earthly paradise."

'"I know it well, my good Bourgeat," said I to him, "but I am in a great difficulty. There 's a trunk for me downstairs that contains linen worth a hundred crowns, with which I could pay the landlord and what I owe to the concierge, and I have not got as much as a hundred sous."

'"Bah! I have some bits of coin," Bourgeat answered me joyfully, showing me an old purse of greasy leather. "Keep your linen."

'Bourgeat paid my three months, and his own rent, and settled with the concierge. Then he put our furniture and my box of linen on his hand-cart and drew it through the streets, stopping at every house that showed a "Lodgings to Let" card. As for me I would go upstairs to see if the place to let would suit

us. At noon we were still wandering about the Quartier Latin without having found anything. The rent was the great obstacle. Bourgeat proposed to me to have lunch at a wine-shop, at the door of which we left the hand-cart. Towards evening, in the Cour de Rohan off the Passage du Commerce, I found, under the roof at the top of a house, two rooms, one on each side of the staircase. We got them for a rent of sixty francs a year each. So there we were housed, myself and my humble friend.

'We dined together. Bourgeat, who earned some fifty sous a day, had saved about a hundred crowns. . . . He would soon be in a position to realise his ambition and buy a water-cart and a horse. When he found out how I was situated—and he wormed out my secrets with a depth of cunning and at the same time with a kindly good nature that still moves my heart to-day when I think of it—he renounced for some time to come the ambition of his life. Bourgeat had been a street seller for twenty-two years. He sacrificed his hundred crowns for my future.'

At this point Desplein took a firm grip of Bianchon's arm.

'He gave me the money required for my examinations! This man, understood, my friend, that I had a mission, that the needs of my intelligence came before his. He busied himself with me, he called me his "little one," he lent me the money I wanted to buy books; he came in sometimes quite quietly to watch

me at my work; finally he took quite a motherly care to see that I substituted a wholesome and abundant diet for the bad and insufficient fare to which I had been condemned. Bourgeat, a man of about forty, had the features of a burgess of the middle ages, a full rounded forehead, a head that a painter might have posed as the model for a Lycurgus. The poor man felt his heart big with affection seeking for some object. He had never been loved by anything but a poodle, that had died a short time before, and about which he was always talking to me, asking if by any possibility the church would consent to have prayers for its soul. His dog, he said, had been really like a Christian, and for twelve years it had gone to church with him, without ever barking, listening to the organ without so much as opening its mouth, and remaining crouched beside him with a look that made one think it was praying with him. This man transferred all his affection to me. He took me up as a lonely, suffering creature. He became for me like a most watchful mother, the most delicately thoughtful of benefactors, in a word the ideal of that virtue that rejoices in its own good work. When I met him in the street he gave me an intelligent look, full of a nobility that you cannot imagine; he would then assume a gait like that of a man who was carrying no burden; he seemed delighted at seeing me in good health and well dressed. It was such devoted affection as one finds among the common people, the love of the little shop girl, raised to a higher level. Bourgeat ran

my errands. He woke me up in the night at the appointed hour. He trimmed my lamp, scrubbed our landing. He was a good servant as well as a good father to me, and as cleanly in his work as an English maid. He looked after our housekeeping. Like Philopoemon he sawed up our firewood, and he set about all his actions with a simplicity in performing them that at the same time preserved his dignity, for he seemed to realise that the end in view ennobled it all.

'When I left this fine fellow to enter the Hôtel Dieu as a resident student, he felt a kind of sorrowful gloom come over him at the thought that he could no longer live with me. But he consoled himself by looking forward to getting together the money that would be necessary for the expenses of my final examination, and he made me promise to come to see him on all my holidays. Bourgeat was proud of me. He loved me for my own sake and for his own. If you look up my essay for the doctorate you will see that it was dedicated to him. In the last year of my indoor course, I had made enough money to be able to repay all I owed to this worthy Auvergnat, by buying him a horse and a water-cart. He was exceedingly angry at finding that I was thus depriving myself of my money, and nevertheless he was delighted at seeing his desires realised. He laughed and he scolded me. He looked at his water-barrel and his horse, and he wiped away a tear as he said to me:—

'"It's a pity! Oh, what a fine water-cart! You have

done wrong! . . . The horse is as strong as if he came from Auvergne!"

'I have never seen anything more touching than this scene. Bourgeat absolutely insisted on buying for me that pocket-case of instruments mounted with silver that you have seen in my study, and which is for me the most valued of my possessions. Although he was enraptured with my first successes he never let slip a word or a gesture, that could be taken to mean, "It is to me that this man's success is due!" And nevertheless, but for him, I should have been killed by my misery. The poor man broke himself down for my sake. He had eaten nothing but bread seasoned with garlic, in order that I might have coffee while I sat up at my work. He fell sick. You may imagine how I passed whole nights at his bedside. I pulled him through it the first time, but two years after there was a relapse, and notwithstanding the most assiduous care, notwithstanding the greatest efforts of science, he had to succumb. No king was ever cared for as he was. Yes, Bianchon, to snatch this life from death I tried unheard-of things. I wanted to make him live long enough to allow him to see the results of his work, to realise all his wishes, to satisfy the one gratitude that had filled my heart, to extinguish a fire that burns in me even now!

'Bourgeat,' continued Desplein, after a pause, with evident emotion, 'Bourgeat, my second father, died in my arms, leaving me all he possessed by a will which he

had made at a public notary's, and which bore the date of the year when we went to lodge in the Cour de Rohan. He had the faith of a simple workman. He loved the Blessed Virgin as he would have loved his mother. Zealous Catholic as he was, he had never said a word to me about my own lack of religion. When he was in danger of death he begged me to spare nothing to obtain the help of the Church for him. I had mass said for him every day. Often in the night he expressed to me his fears for his future; he was afraid that he had not lived a holy enough life. Poor man! he used to work from morning to night. Who is heaven for then, if there is a heaven? He received the last sacraments like the saint that he was, and his death was worthy of his life.

'I was the only one who followed his funeral. When I had laid my one benefactor in the earth, I tried to find out how I could discharge my debt of gratitude to him. I knew that he had neither family nor friends, neither wife nor children. But he believed! he had religious convictions, and had I any right to dispute them? He had spoken to me timidly of masses said for the repose of the dead; he did not seek to impose this duty on me, thinking that it would be like asking to be paid for his services to me. As soon as I could arrange for the endowment, I gave the Saint-Sulpice the sum necessary to have four masses said there each year. As the only thing that I could offer to Bourgeat was the fulfilment of his pious wishes, I go there in his

name on the day the mass is said at the beginning of each quarter of the year, and say the prayers for him that he wished for. I say them in the good faith of one who doubts :—" My God, if there is a sphere where after their death you place those who have been perfect, think of good Bourgeat; and if he has still anything to suffer, lay these sufferings on me, so that he may enter the sooner into what they call Paradise!" This, my dear friend, is all that a man, who holds my opinions, can allow himself. God must be good-hearted, and He will not take it ill on my part. But I swear to you, I would give my fortune for the sake of finding the faith of Bourgeat coming into my brain.'

Bianchon, who attended Desplein in his last illness, does not venture to affirm, even now, that the famous surgeon died an atheist. Will not those who believe take pleasure in the thought that perhaps the poor Auvergnat came to open for him the gate of Heaven, as he had already opened for him the portals of that temple on earth, on the façade of which one reads the words: — *Aux grands hommes la Patrie reconnaissante?*[1]

[1] Inscription on the façade of the Pantheon at Paris.

AN EPISODE OF THE REIGN OF TERROR

About eight o'clock on the evening of January 22nd, 1793, an aged woman was coming down the sharp descent of the Faubourg Saint-Martin that ends in front of the church of Saint-Laurent. Snow had fallen so heavily all day long that hardly a footfall could be heard. The streets were deserted. Fears that the silence around naturally enough inspired were increased by all the terror under which France was then groaning. So the old lady had thus far met with no one else. Her sight, which had long been failing, did not enable her to distinguish far off by the light of the street lamps some passers-by, moving like scattered shadows in the huge thoroughfare of the Faubourg. She went on bravely all alone in the midst of this solitude, as if her age were a talisman that could be relied on to preserve her from any mishap.

When she had passed the Rue des Morts she thought she perceived the heavy, firm tread of a man walking behind her. It occurred to her that it was not the first time she had heard this sound. She was alarmed at the idea that she was being followed, and she tried to

walk faster in order to reach a fairly well-lighted shop, in the hope that, in the light it gave, she would be able to put to the test the suspicions that had taken possession of her.

As soon as she was within the circle of light projected horizontally by the shop-front, she quickly turned her head and caught a glimpse of a human form in the foggy darkness. This vague glimpse was enough for her. She tottered for a moment under the shock of terror that overwhelmed her, for she no longer doubted that she had been followed by the stranger from the first step she had taken outside her lodging. The longing to escape from a spy gave her strength. Without being able to think of what she was doing, she began to run—as if she could possibly get away from a man who must necessarily be much more agile than herself.

After running for a few minutes she reached a confectioner's shop, entered it, and fell, rather than sat, down upon a chair that stood in front of the counter. Even while she was raising the creaking latch, a young woman, who was busy with some embroidery, raised her eyes, and through the small panes of the half-window in the shop door recognised the old-fashioned violet silk mantle, in which the old lady was wrapped. She hurriedly opened a drawer as if looking for something she was to hand over to her.

It was not only by her manner and the look on her face that the young woman showed she was anxious to

get rid of the stranger without delay, as if her visitor were one of those there was no pleasure in seeing; but, besides this, she allowed an expression of impatience to escape her on finding that the drawer was empty. Then, without looking at the lady, she turned suddenly from the counter, went towards the back shop, and called her husband who at once made his appearance.

'Wherever have you put away . . .?' she asked of him, with an air of mystery without finishing her question, but calling his attention to the old lady with a glance of her eyes.

Although the confectioner could see nothing but the immense black silk bonnet, trimmed with bows of violet ribbon, that formed the strange visitor's headgear, he left the shop again, after having cast at his wife a look that seemed to say, 'Do you think I would leave *that* in your counter . . .?'

Surprised at the motionless silence of the old lady the shopwoman turned and approached her, and as she looked at her she felt herself inspired with an impulse of compassion, perhaps not unmingled with curiosity. Although the woman's complexion showed an habitual pallor, like that of one who makes a practice of secret austerities, it was easy to see that a recent emotion had brought an unusual paleness to her face. Her head-dress was so arranged as to conceal her hair. No doubt it was white with age, for there were no marks on the upper part of her dress to show that she used hair powder. The complete absence of ornament lent

to her person an air of religious severity. Her features had a grave, stately look. In these old times the manners and habits of people of quality were so different from those of other classes of society, that it was easy to distinguish one of noble birth. So the young woman felt convinced that the stranger was a *ci-devant*, an ex-aristocrat, and that she had belonged to the court.

'Madame . . .' she said to her with involuntary respect, forgetting that such a title was now forbidden.

The old lady did not reply. She kept her eyes fixed on the window of the shop, as if she could distinguish some fearful object in that direction.

'What is the matter, citizeness?' asked the shop-keeper, who had returned almost immediately.

And the citizen-confectioner roused the lady from her reverie by offering her a little cardboard box wrapped in blue paper.

'Nothing, nothing, my friends,' she answered in a sweet voice. She raised her eyes to the confectioner's face as if to give him a look of thanks, but seeing the red cap on his head, she uttered a cry:—'Ah, you have betrayed me!'

The young woman and her husband replied by a gesture of horror at the thought, which made the stranger blush, perhaps at having suspected them, perhaps with pleasure.

'Pardon me,' she said, with childlike gentleness. Then, taking a *louis d'or* from her pocket, she offered it

to the confectioner :—'Here is the price we agreed on,' she added.

There is a poverty that the poor readily recognise. The confectioner and his wife looked at one another, silently turning each other's attention to the old lady, while both formed one common thought. This *louis d'or* must be her last. The lady's hands trembled as she offered the piece of money, she looked at it with a sadness that had no avarice in it, but she seemed to realise the full extent of the sacrifice she made. Starvation and misery were as plainly marked on her face as the lines that told of fear and of habits of asceticism. In her dress there were traces of old magnificence. It was of worn-out silk. Her mantle was neat though threadbare, with some carefully mended lace upon it. In a word it was a case of wealth the worse for wear. The people of the shop, hesitating between sympathy and self-interest, began by trying to satisfy their consciences with words :—

'But, citizeness, you seem to be very weak——'

'Would Madame like to take something?' said the woman, cutting her husband short.

'We have some very good soup,' added the confectioner.

'It is so cold to-night. Perhaps Madame has had a chill while walking? But you can rest here and warm yourself for a while.'

'We are not as black as the devil!' exclaimed the confectioner.

Won by the tone of kindness that found expression in the words of the charitable shopkeepers, the lady let them know she had been followed by a stranger, and that she was afraid to go back alone to her lodgings.

'Is that all?' replied the man in the red cap, 'wait a little, citizeness.'

He gave the *louis d'or* to his wife. . . . Then moved by that sort of gratitude that finds its way into the heart of a dealer when he has got an exorbitant price for some merchandise of trifling value, he went and put on his national Guard's uniform, took his hat, belted on his sword, and reappeared as an armed man. But his wife had had time to reflect. In her heart, as in so many more, reflection closed the open hand of benevolence. Anxious and fearful of seeing her husband involved in some bad business, the confectioner's wife tried to pull him by the skirt of his coat and stop him. But obeying his own charitable feelings the good fellow offered at once to escort the old lady.

'It seems that the man the citizeness is afraid of is still prowling about in front of our shop,' said the young woman excitedly.

'I am afraid he is,' put in the lady naïvely.

'What if he were a spy? . . . if there were some plot? . . . Don't go, and take back that box from her. . . .'

These words, whispered in the ear of the confectioner by his wife, froze the sudden courage that had inspired him.

'Well, I 'll just say a few words to him, and rid you of him soon enough,' exclaimed the shopkeeper, as he opened the door and slipped hurriedly out.

The old lady, passive as a child and almost stupefied by her fear, sat down again on the chair. The good shopkeeper was soon back. His face, naturally ruddy enough and further reddened by his oven fire, had suddenly become pallid. He was a prey to such terror that his legs shook and his eyes looked like those of a drunken man.

'Do you want to get our heads cut off, you wretch of an aristocrat?' he cried out in a fury. 'Come, show us your heels, and don't let us see you again, and don't reckon on my supplying you with materials for your plots!'

As he ended, the confectioner made an attempt to take back from the old lady the little box which she had put into one of her pockets. But hardly had his bold hands touched her dress, than the stranger—preferring to risk herself amid the perils of the street without any other protector but God, rather than to lose what she had just bought, regained all the agility of youth. She rushed to the door, opened it briskly, and vanished from the sight of wife and husband as they stood trembling and astonished.

As soon as the stranger was outside she started off at a rapid walk. But her strength soon began to desert her, and she heard the spy, who had so pitilessly followed her, making the snow crackle as he crushed it with his

heavy tread. She had to stop. He stopped. She did not dare to address him, or even to look at him—it might be on account of the fear that had seized upon her, or because she could not think what to say. Then she went on again walking slowly.

The man also slackened his pace so as to remain always just at the distance that enabled him to keep her in sight. He seemed to be the very shadow of the old woman. Nine o'clock struck as the silent pair once more passed by the church of Saint-Laurent.

It is a part of the nature of all minds, even of the weakest, to find a feeling of calm succeed to any violent agitation, for if our feelings are infinite, our organism has its limits. So the stranger, finding that her supposed persecutor did her no harm, was inclined to see in him some unknown friend, who was anxious to protect her. She summed up in her mind all the circumstances that had attended the appearance of the stranger, as if seeking for some plausible motives for this consoling opinion, and was then satisfied to recognise on his part a friendly rather than an evil purpose. Forgetful of the alarm, which this man had so short a time ago caused the confectioner, she now went on with a firm step into the upper part of the Faubourg Saint-Martin.

After walking for half an hour she came to a house situated near the point where the street, which leads to the Pantin barrier, branches off from the main line of the Faubourg. Even at the present day the neighbourhood is still one of the loneliest in all Paris. A north-east

wind blowing over the Buttes Chaumont and Belleville whistled between the houses, or rather the cottages, scattered about this almost uninhabited valley, in which the enclosures were formed of fences built up of earth and old bones. The desolate place seemed to be the natural refuge of misery and despair.

The man, all eagerness in the pursuit of this poor creature, who was so bold as to traverse these silent streets in the night, seemed struck by the spectacle that presented itself to his gaze. He stood still, full of thought, in a hesitating attitude, in the feeble light of a street lamp, the struggling rays of which could hardly penetrate the fog. Fear seemed to sharpen the sight of the old lady, who thought she saw something of evil omen in the looks of the stranger. She felt her terror reawakening, and took advantage of the seeming hesitation that had brought the man to a standstill to slip through a shadow to the door of a solitary house, she pushed back a spring latch, and disappeared in an instant like a ghost upon the stage.

The unknown man, without moving from where he stood, kept his eyes fixed on the house, the appearance of which was fairly typical of that of the wretched dwelling places of this suburb of Paris. The tumble-down hovel was built of bricks covered with a coat of yellow plaster, so full of cracks that one feared to see the whole fall down in a heap of ruins before the least effort of the wind. There were three windows to each floor, and their frames, rotten with damp and warped

by the action of the sun, suggested that the cold must penetrate freely into the rooms. The lonely house looked like some old tower that time has forgotten to destroy. A feeble gleam lit up the warped and crooked window-sashes of the garret window, that showed up the roof of this poor edifice, while all the rest of the house was in complete darkness.

Not without difficulty the old woman climbed the rough and clumsy stair, in ascending which one had to lean on a rope that took the place of a handrail. She gave a low knock at the door of the garret room, and hurriedly took her seat on a chair, which an old man offered to her.

'Hide yourself! hide yourself!' she said to him, 'though we so seldom go out, our doings are known, our steps are spied upon. . . .'

'Is there anything new then?' asked another old woman who was seated near the fire.

'That man, who has been prowling round the house since yesterday, followed me this evening. . . .'

At these words the three inmates of the hovel looked at each other, while they showed on their faces signs of serious alarm. Of the three the old man was the least agitated, perhaps because he was the most in danger. Under the weight of a great misfortune, or under the pressure of persecution, a brave man begins, so to say, by making the complete sacrifice of himself. He counts each day as one more victory won over fate. The looks of the two women fixed upon this old man

made it easy to see that he was the one object of their keen anxiety.

'Why lose our trust in God, my sisters?' he said in a voice low, but full of fervour; 'we sang His praises in the midst of the cries of the murderers and of the dying at the convent of the Carmelites. If He willed that I should be saved from that butchery, it was no doubt to preserve me for some destiny that I must accept without a murmur. God guards His own, and He can dispose of them according to His will. It is of yourselves, and not of me, that we must think.'

'No,' said one of the old women, 'what are our lives compared to that of a priest?'

'Once I saw myself outside of the Abbey of Chelles, I considered myself as a dead woman,' said one of the two nuns—the one who had remained in the house.

'Here are the altar breads,' said the other, who had just come in, offering the little box to the priest. 'But . . .' she cried out, 'I hear footsteps on the stairs!'

All three listened. . . . The sound ceased.

'Do not be alarmed,' said the priest, 'if some one tries to get to see you. A person on whose good faith we can depend must by this time have taken all necessary steps to cross the frontier, in order to come here for the letters I have written to the Duc de Langeais and the Marquis de Beauséant, asking them to see what can be done to take you away from this wretched country, and the suffering and death that await you here.'

'You are not going with us then?' exclaimed the two nuns in gentle protest, and with a look of something like despair.

'My place is where there are still victims,' was the priest's simple reply.

They were silent and gazed at their protector with reverent admiration.

'Sister Martha,' he said, addressing the nun who had gone to get the altar breads, 'this envoy of ours should answer "*Fiat voluntas*" to the password "*Hosanna*."'

'There is some one on the stair!' exclaimed the other nun; and she opened a hiding-place constructed in the roof.

This time, in the deep silence, it was easy to catch the sound of the footsteps of some man, re-echoing on the stairs that were rough with lumps of hardened mud. The priest with some difficulty huddled himself into a kind of cupboard, and the nun threw some old clothes over him.

'You can shut the door,' he said in a smothered voice.

The priest was hardly hidden away, when three knocks at the door made both the good women start. They were exchanging looks of inquiry without daring to utter a word. Both seemed to be about sixty years of age. Separated from the world for some forty years, they were like plants, that are so used to the air of a hothouse, that they die if one takes them out. Accustomed as they were to the life of the convent they

had no idea of anything else. One morning their cloister had been broken open, and they had shuddered at finding themselves free. It is easy to imagine the state of nervous weakness the events of the Revolution had produced in their innocent minds. Unable to reconcile the mental habits of the cloister with the difficulties of life, and not fully understanding the circumstances in which they were placed, they were like children of whom every care had been taken till now, and who, suddenly deprived of their mother's care, pray instead of weeping. So face to face with the danger which they now saw before them, they remained silent and passive, knowing of no other defence but Christian resignation.

The man who had asked for admittance interpreted this silence in his own way. He opened the door and suddenly appeared in the room. The two nuns shuddered as they recognised the man, who for some time had been prowling around their house, and making inquiries about them. They remained motionless, looking at him with the anxious curiosity of untaught children who stare in silence at a stranger.

The man was tall in stature and heavily built. But there was nothing in his attitude, his general appearance, or the expression of his face, to suggest that he was a bad character. Like the nuns he kept quite still, and slowly cast his eyes round the room he had entered.

Two straw mats unrolled on the floor served for beds

for the nuns. There was a table in the middle of the room, and there stood on it a brass candlestick, some plates, three knives and a round loaf of bread. There was a very small fire in the grate. A few pieces of wood heaped up in a corner were a further sign of the poverty of these two recluses. One could see that the roof was in a bad state, for the walls, covered with a coat of very old paint, were stained with brown streaks that showed where the rain had leaked through. A reliquary, rescued no doubt from the sack of the Abbey of Chelles, served as an ornament to the mantel-piece. Three chairs, two boxes, and a shabby chest of drawers completed the furniture of the room. A door near the fireplace suggested that there was a second room beyond.

The individual, who had in such an alarming way introduced himself to this poor household, had soon taken mental note of all the contents of the little room. A feeling of pity could be traced upon his countenance, and he cast a kindly look upon the two women, and appeared to be at least as much embarrassed as they were. The strange silence that all three had kept so far did not long continue, for at last the stranger realised the timidity and inexperience of the two poor creatures, and said to them in a voice that he tried to make as gentle as possible:—

'I do not come here as an enemy, citizenesses . . .' He stopped, as if recovering himself, and went on:—

'Sisters, if any misfortune comes your way, believe me I have no part in it. . . . I have a favour to ask of you.'

They still kept silence.

'If I am troubling you, if . . . if I am causing you pain, say so freely . . . and I will go away; but be assured that I am entirely devoted to you; that if there is any kindness I can do to you, you can claim it from me without fear; and that I am perhaps the only one who is above the law, now that there is no longer a king. . . .'

There was such an air of truth in his words, that Sister Agatha, she of the two nuns who belonged to the noble family of Langeais, and whose manners seemed to indicate that in old times she had known the splendours of festive society and had breathed the air of the court—pointed with an alert movement to one of the chairs as if asking the visitor to be seated. The stranger showed something of pleasure mingled with sadness, as he understood this gesture, but before taking the chair he waited till both the worthy ladies were seated.

'You have given a refuge here,' he continued, 'to a venerable priest, one of those who refused the oath, and who had a miraculous escape from the massacre at the Carmelites. . . .' '*Hosanna*!' . . . said Sister Agatha, interrupting the stranger, and looking at him with anxious curiosity.

'I don't think that is his name,' he replied.

'But, sir, we have no priest here,' said Sister Martha, eagerly.

'If that is so, you ought to be more careful and prudent,' answered the stranger in a gentle tone, as he stretched out his hand to the table and took a breviary from it, 'I don't suppose you know Latin, and . . .'

He said no more, for the extraordinary emotion depicted on the faces of the two poor nuns made him fear that he had gone too far. They were trembling, and their eyes filled with tears.

'Don't be alarmed,' he said in a voice that seemed all sincerity, 'I know the name of your guest, and your own names too, and for the last three days I have been aware of your distress and of your devoted care for the venerable Abbé de . . .'

'Hush!' said Sister Agatha in her simplicity, putting a finger to her lips.

'You see, Sister, that if I had had in my mind the horrible idea of betraying you, I could have done so already, again and again. . . .'

Hearing these words, the priest extricated himself from his prison, and came out again into the room.

'I could not possibly believe, sir,' he said to the stranger, 'that you were one of our persecutors, and I trust myself to you. What do you want of me?'

The holy confidence of the priest, the nobility of mind that showed itself in his every look, would have disarmed even assassins. The mysterious man, whose coming had caused such excitement in this scene of re-

signed misery, gazed for a moment at the group formed by the three others; then, taking a tone in which there was no longer any hesitation, he addressed the priest in these words:—

'Father, I came to ask you to say a mass for the dead, for the repose of the soul . . . of one . . . of a sacred personage, whose body will never be laid to rest in consecrated ground. . . .'

The priest gave an involuntary shudder. The nuns, who did not yet understand to whom it was the stranger alluded, sat in an attitude of curiosity, their heads stretched forwards, their faces turned towards the two who were speaking together. The priest looked closely at the stranger, on whose face there was an unmistakable expression of anxiety, and also of earnest entreaty.

'Well,' replied the priest, 'come back this evening at midnight, and I shall be ready to celebrate the only rites for the dead that we may be able to offer up in expiation for the crime of which you speak. . . .'

The stranger started, but it seemed that some deep and soothing satisfaction was triumphing over his secret sorrow. After having respectfully saluted the priest and the two holy women, he took his departure showing a kind of silent gratitude, which was understood by these three generous souls.

About two hours after this scene the stranger returned, knocked softly at the door of the garret, and was admitted by Mademoiselle de Beauséant, who led him

into the inner room of this poor place of refuge, where everything had been made ready for the ceremony.

Between two chimney shafts, that passed up through the room, the nuns had placed the old chest of drawers, the antiquated outlines of which were hidden by a magnificent altar frontal of green watered silk. A large crucifix of ivory and ebony hung on the yellow washed wall contrasting so strongly with the surrounding bareness, that the eye could not fail to be drawn to it. Four slender little tapers, which the sisters had succeeded in fixing on this improvised altar, by attaching them to it with sealing wax, threw out a dim light, that was hardly reflected by the wall. This feeble illumination barely gave light to the rest of the room; but, as it thus shone only on the sacred objects, it seemed like a light sent down from heaven on this unadorned altar. The floor was damp. The roof, which slanted down sharply on two sides, as is usual in garret rooms, had some cracks in it through which came the night wind—icy cold.

Nothing could be more devoid of all pomp, and nevertheless there was perhaps never anything more solemn than this mournful ceremony. A profound silence, in which one could have heard the least sound uttered on the highway outside, lent a kind of sombre majesty to the midnight scene. Finally the greatness of the action itself contrasted so strongly with the poverty of its surroundings that the result was a feeling of religious awe.

On each side of the altar the two aged nuns knelt on the tiled floor without taking any notice of its deadly dampness, and united their prayers with those of the priest, who, robed in his sacerdotal vestments, placed on the altar a chalice of gold adorned with precious stones, a consecrated vessel that had been saved no doubt from the pillage of the Abbey of Chelles. Beside this chalice, a token of royal munificence, the wine and water destined for the Holy Sacrifice stood ready in two glasses, such as one would hardly have found in the poorest inn. For want of a missal the priest had placed a small prayer-book on the corner of the altar. An ordinary plate had been prepared for the washing of the hands, in this case hands all innocent and free from blood. There was the contrast of littleness with immensity; of poverty with noble sublimity; of what was meant for profane uses with what was consecrated to God.

The stranger knelt devoutly between the two nuns. But suddenly, as he noticed that, having no other means of marking that this was a mass offered for the dead, the priest had placed a knot of crape on the crucifix and on the base of the chalice, thus putting holy things in mourning, the stranger's mind was so mastered by some recollection that drops of sweat stood out upon his broad forehead. The four silent actors in the scene looked at each other mysteriously. Then their souls, acting and reacting on each other, inspired with one common thought, united them in devout sym-

pathy. It seemed as if their minds had evoked the presence of the martyr whose remains the quicklime had burned away, and that his shade was present with them in all its kingly majesty. They were celebrating a requiem without the presence of the body of the departed. Under the disjointed laths and tiles of the roof four Christians were about to intercede with God for a King of France, and perform his obsequies though there was no coffin before the altar. There was the purest of devoted love, an act of wondrous loyalty performed without a touch of self-consciousness. No doubt, in the eyes of God, it was like the gift of the glass of water that ranks with the highest of virtues. All the monarchy was there, finding voice in the prayers of a priest and two poor women; but perhaps the Revolution too was represented by that man, whose face showed too much remorse to leave any doubt that he was fulfilling a duty inspired by deep repentance.

Before he pronounced the Latin words, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, the priest, as if by an inspiration from on high, turned to the three who were with him as the representatives of Christian France, and said to them, as though to banish from their sight all the misery of the garret room :—

'We are about to enter into the sanctuary of God!'

At these words, uttered with deep devotion, a holy awe took possession of the stranger and the two nuns. Under the vast arches of St. Peter's at Rome these Christians could not have realised the majesty of God's

Presence more plainly than in that refuge of misery; so true is it that between Him and man all outward things seem useless, and His greatness comes from Himself alone. The stranger showed a really fervent devotion. So the same feelings united the prayers of these four servants of God and the king. The sacred words sounded like a heavenly music in the midst of the silence. There was a moment when the unknown man could not restrain his tears. It was at the *Pater Noster*, when the priest added this prayer in Latin which no doubt the stranger understood:—

'*Et remitte scelus regicidis sicut Ludovicus eis remisit semetipse.* (And forgive their crime to the regicides, as Louis himself forgave them.)'

The nuns saw two large tear-drops making lines of moisture down the strong face of the unknown, and falling to the floor.

The Office for the Dead was recited. The *Domine salvum fac regem*, chanted in a low voice, touched the hearts of these faithful Royalists, who thought how the child king, for whom at that moment they were imploring the help of the Most High, was a captive in the hands of his enemies. The stranger shuddered as he remembered that perhaps a fresh crime might be committed, in which he would no doubt be forced to have a share.

When the Office for the Dead was ended, the priest made a sign to the two nuns and they withdrew. As soon as he found himself alone with the stranger, he

went towards him with a sad and gentle air, and said to him in a fatherly voice :—

'My son, if you have imbrued your hands in the blood of the martyr king, confide in me. There is no fault that is not blotted out in God's eyes by a repentance as sincere and as touching as yours appears to be.'

At the first words uttered by the priest the stranger gave way to an involuntary movement of alarm. But he recovered his self-control, and looked calmly at the astonished priest.

'Father,' he said to him, in a voice that showed evident signs of emotion, 'no one is more innocent than I am of the blood that has been shed. . . .'

'It is my duty to take your word for it,' said the priest.

There was a pause, during which once more he looked closely at his penitent. Then, persisting in taking him for one of those timid members of the National Convention who abandoned to the executioner a sacred and inviolable head in order to save their own, he spoke once more in a grave tone :—

'Consider, my son, that in order to be guiltless of this great crime it does not suffice merely to have had no direct co-operation in it. Those who, although they could have defended the king, left their swords in their scabbards, will have a very heavy account to render to the King of Heaven. . . . Oh, yes!' added the old priest, shaking his head expressively from side to side.

'Yes, very heavy! . . . for in standing idle, they have made themselves the involuntary accomplices of this awful misdeed.'

'Do you think,' asked the man, as if struck with horror, 'that even an indirect participation in it will be punished? . . . Are we then to take it that, say, a soldier who was ordered to keep the ground at the scaffold is guilty? . . .'

The priest hesitated. Pleased at the dilemma in which he had put this Puritan of Royalism, by placing him between the doctrine of passive obedience, which, according to the partisans of the monarchy, must be the essence of the military code, and the equally important doctrine which was the sanction of the respect due to the person of the king, the stranger eagerly accepted the priest's hesitation as indicating a favourable solution of the doubts that seemed to harrass him. Then, in order not to give the venerable theologian further time for reflection, he said to him:—

'I would be ashamed to offer you any honorarium for the funeral service you have just celebrated for the repose of the soul of the king, and to satisfy my own conscience. One can only pay the price of what is inestimable by offering that which is also beyond price. Will you therefore condescend, sir, to accept the gift I make you of a sacred relic. . . . Perhaps the day will come when you will understand its value.'

As he ceased speaking, the stranger held out to the priest a little box that was extremely light. The latter

took it in his hands automatically, so to say, for the solemnity of the words of this man, the tone in which he spoke, the reverence with which he handled the box, had plunged him into a reverie of deep astonishment. Then they returned to the room where the two nuns were waiting for them.

'You are,' said the stranger to them, 'in a house the proprietor of which, the plasterer, Mucius Scaevola, who lives in the first story, is famous in the quarter for his patriotism. But all the same he is secretly attached to the Bourbons. Formerly he was a huntsman to Monseigneur the Prince de Conti, and he owes his fortune to him. By staying here you are safer than anywhere else in France. Remain here, therefore. Certain pious souls will provide for your needs, and you can wait without danger for less evil times. A year hence, on January 21st' (as he pronounced these last words, he could not conceal an involuntary start), 'if this poor place is still your refuge, I shall come back to assist once more with you at a mass of expiation.'

He stopped without further explanation. He saluted the silent inhabitants of the garret, took in with a last look the signs that told of their poverty, and left the room.

For the two simple nuns such an adventure had all the interest of a romance. So when the venerable abbé had told them of the mysterious present so solemnly made to him by this man, they placed the box on the table, and the feeble light of the candle,

shining on the three anxious faces, showed on all of them a look of indescribable curiosity. Mademoiselle de Langeais opened the box, and found in it a handkerchief of fine cambric soiled with perspiration. As they unfolded it they saw spots on it:—

'They are blood stains,' said the priest.

'It is marked with the royal crown!' exclaimed the other sister.

With a feeling of horror the two sisters dropped the precious relic. For these two simple souls the mystery that surrounded the stranger had become something inexplicable. And, as for the priest, from that day he did not even attempt to find an explanation of it in his own mind.

It was not long before the three prisoners realised that notwithstanding the Terror an invisible hand was stretched out to protect them. At first firewood and provisions were sent in for them. Then the two nuns guessed that a woman was associated with their protector, for they were sent linen and clothes that would make it possible for them to go out without attracting attention by the aristocratic fashion of the dress they had been forced to wear till then. Finally Mucius Scaevola provided them with two 'civic cards,' certificates of good citizenship. Often by roundabout ways they received warnings, that were necessary for the safety of the priest, and they recognised that these friendly hints came so opportunely that they could only emanate from some one who was initiated into the secrets of the

state. Notwithstanding the famine from which Paris was suffering, the refugees found rations of white bread left regularly at their garret door by invisible hands. However, they thought they could identify in Mucius Scaevola the mysterious agent of this beneficence, which was always as ingenious as it was well directed.

The noble refugees in the garret could have no doubt but that their protector was the same person who had come to assist at the mass of expiation on the night of January 22nd, 1793. He thus became the object of a very special regard on the part of all three. They hoped in him only, lived only thanks to him. They had added special prayers for him to their devotions; morning and night these pious souls offered up petitions for his welfare, for his prosperity, for his salvation. They begged God to remove all temptations from him, to deliver him from his enemies, and to give him a long and peaceful life. Their gratitude was thus, so to say, daily renewed, but was inevitably associated with a feeling of curiosity that became keener as day after day went by.

The circumstances that had attended the appearance of the stranger were the subject of their conversations. They formed a thousand conjectures with regard to him, and it was a fresh benefit to them of another kind that he thus served to distract their minds from other thoughts. They were quite determined that on the night, when, according to his promise, he would come back to celebrate the mournful anniversary of the

death of Louis XVI., they would not let him go without establishing more friendly relations with him.

The night, to which they had looked forward so impatiently, came at last. At midnight the heavy footsteps of the unknown resounded on the old wooden stair. The room had been made ready to receive him; the altar was prepared. This time the sisters opened the door before he reached it, and both hastened to show a light on the staircase. Mademoiselle de Langeais even went down a few steps in order the sooner to see their benefactor.

'Come,' she said to him in a voice trembling with affection, 'come . . . you are expected.'

The man raised his head, and without replying cast a gloomy look at the nun. She felt as if a mantle of ice had fallen around her, and kept silence. At the sight of him the feeling of gratitude and of curiosity died out in all their hearts. He was perhaps less cold, less taciturn, less terrible than he appeared to these souls, whom the excitement of their feelings disposed to a warm and friendly welcome. The three poor prisoners realised that the man wished to remain a stranger to them, and they accepted the situation.

The priest thought that he noticed a smile, that was at once repressed, play upon the lips of the unknown, when he remarked the preparations that had been made for his reception. He heard mass and prayed. But then he went away after having declined, with a few words of polite refusal, the invitation that Mademoiselle

de Langeais offered him to share with them the little supper that had been made ready.

After the 9th Thermidor—(the fall of Robespierre)—both the nuns and the Abbé de Marolles were able to go about in Paris without incurring the least danger. The old priest's first excursion was to a perfumer's shop at the sign of the *Reine des Fleurs*, kept by Citizen Ragon and his wife, formerly perfumers to the court, who had remained faithful to the royal family. The Vendéans made use of them as their agents for corresponding with the exiled princes and the royalist committee at Paris. The abbé, dressed as the times required, was standing on the doorstep of the shop, which was situated between the Church of Saint Roch and the Rue des Frondeurs, when a crowd, which filled all the Rue Saint-Honoré, prevented him from going out.

'What is the matter?' he asked Madame Ragon.

'It's nothing,' she replied. 'It's the cart with the executioner on the way to the Place Louis XV. Ah! we saw it often enough last year. But to-day, four days after the anniversary of January 21st, one can watch that terrible procession go by without feeling displeasure.'

'Why?' said the abbé, 'it is not Christian of you to talk thus.'

'But it's the execution of the accomplices of Robespierre. They did their best to save themselves, but they are going in their turn where they sent so many innocent people!'

The crowd was pouring past like a flood. The Abbé de Marolles, yielding to an impulse of curiosity, saw, standing erect on the cart, the man who three days before had come to hear his mass.

'Who is that?' he said, 'the man who . . .'

'It's the hangman,' replied Monsieur Ragon, giving the executioner the name he bore under the monarchy.

'My dear, my dear,' cried out Madame Ragon, 'Monsieur l'Abbé is dying!'

And the old lady seized a bottle of smelling salts with which to revive the aged priest from a fainting fit.

'No doubt,' he said, 'what he gave me was the handkerchief with which the King wiped his forehead as he went to martyrdom. . . . Poor man! . . . The steel blade had a heart when all France was heartless! . . .'

The perfumers thought that the poor priest was raving.

FACINO CANE

I WAS living in a small street of which doubtless you do not even know the name, the Rue des Lesdiguières. It begins at the Rue St. Antoine opposite the fountain near the Place de la Bastille, and runs into the Rue de la Cerisaie. The love of learning had flung me into a garret where I worked during the night, and I passed the day in a neighbouring library, the *Bibliothèque de Monsieur*. I lived frugally. I had accepted all those conditions of a monastic life that are so necessary to workers. When it was fine I barely allowed myself a walk on the Boulevard Bourdon. One passion only drew me away from my studious habits, but was not even that a sort of study? I would go out to observe the manners of the Faubourg, its inhabitants and their characters. As badly dressed as the workmen themselves and careless about keeping up an appearance, I did not make them in any way suspicious of me. I could mingle freely with them, and watch them making their bargains and quarrelling amongst themselves as they left their work. With me the power of observation had already become intuitive. It penetrated to the soul, without leaving the body out of account: or rather, it grasped so well the outer details, that it went at once beyond them; it gave

me the power of living the life of the individual, on whom I brought it to bear, thus permitting me in fancy to substitute myself for him, as the dervish in the *Arabian Nights* took the body and soul of the persons over whom he pronounced certain words.

When between eleven o'clock and midnight I met a workman and his wife returning together from the Ambigu Comique, I amused myself by following them from the Boulevard du Pont-aux-Choux as far as the Boulevard Beaumarchais. These good people would talk at first of the piece they had just seen. From one thing to another they would get on to their own affairs. The mother would be dragging her child by the hand without heeding either its complaints or its questions. The pair would reckon up the money that would be paid them next day, and spend it in twenty different ways. Then came household details; complaints as to the excessive price of potatoes, or about the length of the winter and the dearness of peat fuel; strong representations as to the amount owing to the baker; and at last disputes that became a bit angry, and in which the character of each came out in picturesque expressions. While listening to these people I could enter into their life; I felt myself with their rags on my back; I walked with my feet in their broken shoes; their desires, their needs all came into my soul, or my soul passed into theirs. It was the dream of one who was still wide awake. With them I grew angry against the foremen of the workshops who tyrannised over them, or against

the bad custom that forced them to come again and again to ask in vain for their pay. To get away from my ordinary occupations, to become some one else by this over excitation of my mental faculties, and to play this game at my will—this was my recreation. To what do I owe this gift? Is it a kind of second sight? or is it one of those powers the abuse of which would lead to insanity? I have never investigated the sources of this faculty of mine; I possess it and I make use of it, that is all.

I need only tell you that in those days I had analysed the elements of that heterogeneous mass called 'the people,' so that I could estimate their good and bad qualities. Already I knew all that was to be learned from that famous Faubourg, that nursery of Revolutions, which gives shelter at once to heroes, inventors, and practical scientists, and knaves and scoundrels,—to virtues and vices, all huddled together by misery, stifled by poverty, drowned in wine, wasted by strong drink. You would never imagine how many unknown adventures, how many forgotten dramas belong to that city of sorrow. How many horrible and beautiful things! For imagination would never go so far as the reality that is hidden there, and that no one can go there and discover. One has to go down to too great a depth if one is to find out those wonderful scenes of living tragedy or comedy, masterpieces that chance has brought into being.

I know not why I have so long kept untold the story

that I am going to relate to you; it is one of those strange tales that are laid by in the bag from which memory draws them out at haphazard like the numbers of a lottery. I have plenty of others quite as singular as this one, buried away in the same fashion; but they will have their turn, believe me.

One day my housekeeper, a working man's wife, came and asked me to honour with my presence the wedding of one of her sisters. In order to enable you to understand what sort of a wedding it would be I must tell you that I used to pay forty sous a month to this poor creature, who came in every morning to make my bed, polish my shoes, brush my clothes, sweep the room, and get my breakfast ready. For the rest of her time she went to turn the handle of a mangle, and by this hard work earned ten sous a day. Her husband, a cabinet-maker, earned four francs. But, as their household included three children, they could barely pay for the bread they ate. I have never come across more real respectability than that of this man and wife. Five years after I had left the neighbourhood Dame Vaillant came to wish me a happy name day, and brought me a bunch of flowers and some oranges as presents—she who had never been in a position to save ten sous. Poverty had drawn us together. I was never able to pay her more than ten francs, often borrowed for the occasion. This will explain my promise to go to the wedding; I counted on taking an unobtrusive part in the rejoicings of these poor people.

The feast and the dance were both held at a wine shop in the Rue de Charenton, in a large room on the first story. It was lighted with lamps with tin reflectors; the paper showed grease spots at the level of the tables, and along the walls there were wooden benches. In this room some eighty people, dressed in their Sunday clothes, decked out with flowers and ribbons, all full of the holiday spirit, danced with flushed faces as if the world was coming to an end. The happy pair kissed each other amid a general outbreak of satisfaction, and one heard 'Eh! eh!' and 'Ah! ah!' pronounced in a tone of amusement, that all the same was more respectable than the timid ogling of young women of a better class. Every one manifested a rough and ready pleasure that had in it something infectious.

But neither the general aspect of the gathering, nor the wedding, nor anything of the kind, has really to do with our story. Only I want you to keep in mind the quaint setting of it all. Imagine to yourself the shabby shop, with its decorations of red paint, smell the odour of the wine, listen to the shouts of delight, keep to the Faubourg, in the midst of these workers, these old men, these poor women abandoning themselves to one night of pleasure.

The orchestra was made up of three blind men from the Hospice des Quinze-Vingts; the first was the violin, the second the clarionet, and the third the flageolet. All three were paid one lump sum of seven francs for

the night. At this price, of course, they gave us neither Rossini nor Beethoven; they played what they liked and what they could, and with a charming delicacy of feeling no one found fault with them for it! Their music was such a rough trial to my ears, that, after a glance at the audience, I looked at the trio of blind men, and recognising the uniform of the hospice, I felt from the first disposed to be indulgent. These artists were seated in the deep bay of a window, and thus in order to be able to distinguish their features one had to be near them; I did not at once come close to them; but when I approached them I cannot say how it was, but all was over with me, I forgot the marriage and the music; my curiosity was excited to the highest pitch, for my soul passed into the body of the clarionet player. The violin and the flageolet had both commonplace features, the well-known face of the blind, with its strained look, all attention and seriousness; but that of the clarionet player was one of those phenomenal faces that make the artist or the philosopher stop at once to look at them.

Imagine a plaster mask of Dante, lighted up with the red glare of an Argand-lamp, and crowned with a forest of silver white hair. His blindness added to the bitter, sorrowful expression of this splendid face, for one could imagine the dead eyes were alive again; a burning light seemed to shine out from them, the expression of a single, ceaseless desire that had set its deep marks on the rounded forehead, which was scored by wrinkles

like the lines of an old wall. The old man was blowing away at haphazard, without paying the least attention to time or tune, his fingers rising and falling, and moving the old keys through mere mechanical habit. He did not trouble about making what is called in the slang of the orchestra 'quacks,' and the dancers took no more notice of this than the two comrades of my Italian did—for I made up my mind that he must be an Italian, and an Italian he was. There was something noble and commanding to be seen in this aged Homer, who kept all to himself some Odyssey destined to forgetfulness. It was a nobility so real that it still triumphed over his obscurity; an air of command so striking that it rose superior to his poverty. None of the strong feelings that lead a man to good as well as to evil, that make of him a convict or a hero, were wanting to this splendidly outlined face, with its sallow, Italian complexion, and the shadows of the iron-grey eyebrows that threw their shade over the deep cavities in which one would tremble at seeing the light of thought appear once more, as one fears to see brigands armed with torch and dagger show themselves at the mouth of a cavern. There was a lion in that cage of flesh, a lion of which the fury had uselessly spent itself on the iron of its bars. The fire of despair had burned out among its ashes, the lava had cooled; but rifts, fallen rocks, and a little smoke told of the violence of the eruption, the ravages of the fire. These ideas called up by the aspect of the man were as warmly

pictured in my mind, as they were coldly marked upon his face.

In the interval between each dance the violin and the flageolet, becoming seriously occupied with a bottle and glasses, hung their instruments to a button of their reddish tunics, and stretched out a hand to a little table standing in the bay of the window, on which were their refreshments. They always offered the Italian a full glass, which he could not have got unaided, for the table was behind his chair. Each time the clarionet thanked them with a friendly nod of his head. Their movements were carried out with that precision, which always seems so astonishing in the case of the blind folk from the Quinze-Vingts, and which seems to make one think they can see. I drew near to the three blind men to listen to them, but when I stood near them they somehow scrutinised me, and doubtless failing to recognise the workman type in me, they said not a word.

'From what country are you, you who play the clarionet?'

'From Venice,' answered the blind man, with a slight Italian accent.

'Were you born blind, or were you blinded by . . .'

'By a mishap,' he replied sharply; 'a cursed amaurosis in my eyes.'

'Venice is a beautiful city. I have always had an idea of going there.'

The face of the old man became animated, its furrows rose and fell, he was strongly moved.

'If I went there with you, you would not lose your time,' said he to me.

'Don't talk of Venice to him,' said the violin to me, 'or our Doge will start his story. Besides that he has already two bottles under his belt, the old prince!'

'Come, let us be getting on, Père Canard,' said the flageolet.

All three began to play; but all the time that they were going through the four parts of the quadrille the Venetian was sizing me up; he guessed the extraordinary interest I took in him. His face lost its cold expression of sadness. Some hope or other brightened all his features—played like a blue flame in the wrinkles of his face. He smiled as he wiped his forehead—that forehead with its bold and terrible look; finally he became quite gay, like a man who is getting up on his hobby.

'What is your age?' I asked him.

'Eighty-two years.'

'How long have you been blind?'

'It will soon be fifty years,' he replied, in a tone which suggested that his regret was not only for the loss of his sight, but also for some great power of which he had been deprived.

'But why do they call you the Doge?' I asked him.

'Ah! that's a joke,' he said; 'I am a patrician of Venice, and I could have been a Doge as well as any one else.'

'What is your name then?'

'Here,' he said, 'I am old Canet. My name has never appeared otherwise on the local registers. But in Italian it is Marco Facino Cane, Prince of Varese.'

'What! Are you descended from the famous condottiere, Facino Cane, whose conquests passed into the possession of the Dukes of Milan?'

'*É vero* (that 's true),' said he. 'In those times the son of Cane, to escape being killed by the Visconti, took refuge in Venice, and had his name inscribed in the Golden Book of nobility. But now neither the Book nor any of the House of Cane are left!'

And he made a startling gesture to signify his feeling that patriotism was dead, and his disgust for human affairs.

'But if you were a Senator of Venice, you must have been rich. How did you come to lose your fortune?'

At this question he raised his head, turning to me as if regarding me with a movement full of truest tragedy, and replied to me:—

'In the midst of misfortunes!'

He no longer thought of drinking; with a wave of his hand he refused the glass of wine which the old flageolet player offered him at this moment, then he bowed down his head.

These details were not of a kind to put an end to my curiosity. During the quadrille that the three instruments played in mechanical style, I watched the old Venetian noble with the feelings that devour a man of

only twenty. I saw Venice and the Adriatic, and I saw its ruin in this ruined face. I was moving about in that city so beloved of its inhabitants. I went from the Rialto to the Grand Canal, from the Riva degli Schiavoni to the Lido; I came back to its cathedral so sublime in its originality; I looked up at the windows of the Casa d'Oro, each of which has different ornaments; I contemplated its old palaces, so rich in marbles—in a word, all those wonders that move the student's feelings all the more when he can colour them with his fancy, and does not spoil the poetry of his dreams by the sight of the reality. I traced backward the course of the life of this scion of the greatest of the condottieri, seeking out in it the traces of his misfortunes and the causes of the deep physical and moral degradation that made the sparks of greatness and nobility that shone again at that moment seem all the finer. Our thoughts were no doubt in mutual accord, for I believe that blindness makes mental communication much more rapid, by preventing the attention from dispersing itself on external things. I had not long to wait for a proof of our bond of feeling. Facino Cane stopped playing, rose, came to me and said, 'Come out,' in a way that produced on me the effect of an electric shock. I gave him my arm and we went away.

When we were in the street, he said to me:—

'Will you take me to Venice, guide me there? Will you have confidence in me? You will be richer than the ten richest firms of Amsterdam or London; richer

than the Rothschilds; in a word, rich as the *Arabian Nights.*'

I thought the man was mad. But there was in his voice a power that I obeyed. I let him lead me, and he took me in the direction of the ditches of the Bastille, as if he still had the use of his eyes. He sat down on a stone in a very lonely place, where, since then, the bridge has been built under which the Canal Saint Martin passes to the Seine. I took my place on another stone facing the old man, whose white hairs glittered like threads of silver in the moonlight. The silence, hardly disturbed by such stormy sounds as reached us from the Boulevards, the brightness of the night, all helped to make the scene something fantastic.

'You talk of millions to a young man, and you think that he would hesitate to endure a thousand ills to secure them! Are you not making a jest of me?'

'May I die without confession,' said he fiercely, 'if what I am about to tell you is not true! I was once a young man of twenty as you are now. I was rich. I was handsome. I was a noble. I began with first of all follies—love. I loved as men no longer love, going so far as to hide in a chest at the risk of being stabbed, without having received anything else but the promise of a kiss. To die for her seemed to me worth a whole life. In 1760 I fell in love with one of the Vendramini, a girl of eighteen, married to a certain Sagredo, one of the richest of the Senators, a man of thirty years, madly devoted to his wife. My lover and I, we were as inno-

cent as two little cherubs when the husband surprised us talking love together. I was unarmed, he was armed but he missed me. I sprang on him, I strangled him with my two hands, twisting his neck like a chicken's. I wanted to go away with Bianca, but she would not go with me. That 's what women are like! I went away alone. I was condemned in my absence, my property was confiscated for the benefit of my heirs; but I had carried off with me my diamonds, five pictures by Titian rolled up, and all my gold. I went to Milan, where I was not molested, for my affair did not interest the State.

'One little remark before going on,' he said, after a pause. 'Whether it is true or not that a woman's fancies influence her child before its birth, it is certain that my mother had a passion for gold while she was expecting mine.' I have a monomania for gold, the satisfaction of which is so necessary for my very life, that in whatever circumstances I have been, I have never been without some gold in my possession. I am always handling gold. When I was young I always wore jewels, and I always carried about with me two or three hundred ducats.'

As he said these words he took two ducats out of his pocket and showed them to me.

'I can smell gold. Although I am blind, I stop in front of the jewellers' shops. This passion was my ruin. I became a gambler, to have the enjoyment of gold. I was not a swindler; I was swindled. I ruined myself. When I had no longer any of my

fortune left I was seized with a wild longing to see Bianca again. I returned secretly to Venice. I found her once more; I was happy for six months, hidden with her, supported by her. I had a delightful thought of thus living my life to the end. Her hand was sought by the Proveditore of the Republic. He guessed he had a rival; in Italy they can almost smell them; he spied on us, and surprised us together, the coward! You can imagine what a sharp fight there was. I did not kill him, but I wounded him seriously. That adventure broke off my happiness. Since that day I never found any one like Bianca. I have had many pleasures. I lived at the court of Louis xv. in the midst of the most famous women, but nowhere did I find the characteristics, the graces, the love of my fair Venetian.

'The Proveditore had his followers. He called them. The palace was surrounded. I defended myself, hoping to die before the eyes of my dear Bianca, who helped me to kill the Proveditore. Formerly this woman had refused to share my flight, now, after six months of happiness, she was ready to die my death, and received several blows. Entangled in a big cloak that they threw over me, I was rolled in it, carried to a gondola and conveyed to the dungeons of the Pozzi. I was only twenty-two years old then, and I held so fast to the fragment of my broken sword, that to get it from me they would have had to cut off my wrist. By a strange chance, or rather inspired by a thought for the future,

I hid this bit of steel in a corner, in case it might be of use to me. I was given medical care. None of my wounds were mortal. At twenty-two one can recover from anything. I was doomed to die by decapitation, but I pretended to be ill in order to gain time. I believed that I was in a dungeon next to the canal. My plan was to escape by making a hole through the wall and swimming across the canal at the risk of drowning myself.

'Here are some of the reasons on which I based my hopes :—

'Whenever the jailer brought me my food I read, by the light he carried, inscriptions scrawled upon the walls, such as, "Towards the palace," "Towards the canal," "Towards the underground passage," and at last succeeded in making out a general plan of the place. There were some small difficulties about it, but they could be explained by the actual state of the Palace of the Doges, which is not completed. With the cleverness that the desire to regain one's liberty gives one, by feeling with my fingers the surface of a stone, I succeeded in deciphering an Arabic inscription, by which the writer of the words intimated to his successors that he had loosened two stones in the lowest course of masonry, and dug beyond them eleven feet of a tunnel. In order to continue his task it was necessary to spread over the floor of the dungeon itself the little bits of stone and mortar produced by the work of excavation. Even if my keepers or the inquisitors had

not felt quite easy in their minds on account of the very structure of the building, which made only an external surveillance necessary, the arrangement of the Pozzi dungeons, into which one descends by a few steps, made it possible gradually to raise the level of the floor without its being noticed by the jailers. The immense amount of work he had done had proved to be superfluous, at least for the man who had undertaken it, for the fact that it had been left unfinished told of the death of the unknown prisoner. In order that his zeal might not be useless for ever, it was necessary that some future prisoner should know Arabic; but I had studied Eastern languages at the Armenian convent of Venice. A sentence written on the back of one of the stones told the fate of this unfortunate man, who had died the victim of his immense riches, which Venice had coveted, and of which she had taken possession. It took me a month to arrive at any result. Whilst I was at work, and during the intervals when I was overwhelmed with fatigue I heard the sound of gold, I thought I could see gold before me, I was dazzled by diamonds! . . . Oh! just wait.

'One night, my piece of steel, now blunted, came upon wood. I sharpened my broken fragment of a sword and made a hole in the wood. In order to work I used to drag myself along like a serpent on my stomach, and I stripped so as to dig like a mole, with my hands out in front of me, stretched on the stones I had already burrowed through. In two days I was to appear before

my judges, so during this night I meant to make a last effort. I cut through the wood, and my blade struck against nothing beyond it.

'Imagine my surprise when I put my eye to the hole! I had penetrated the wainscot of an underground room, in which a dim light allowed me to see a great heap of gold. The Doge and one of the Council of Ten were in this cellar. I heard their voices. From their talk, I gathered that here was the secret hoard of the Republic, the gifts of the Doges, and the reserves of booty known as the "share of Venice," and levied on the produce of over-sea expeditions.

'I was saved!

'When next the jailer came, I proposed to him to assist me to escape, and to go away with me, taking off with us all that we could carry. There was no reason to hesitate, and he agreed. A ship was about to sail for the Levant. Every precaution was taken. Bianca lent her aid to the plans I dictated to my accomplice. In order not to arouse suspicion Bianca was to rejoin us only at Smyrna. In a single night the hole was enlarged, and we climbed down into the secret treasury of Venice. What a night! I saw four huge casks full of gold. In the room before that, silver was in the same profusion, piled up in two heaps, leaving a path in the middle by which to pass through the room, with the coins sloping up in piles on each side till they reached a height of five feet at the walls. I thought the jailer would go mad. He sang, he danced, he laughed, he cut

capers among the gold. I threatened to strangle him if he wasted our time or made a noise. In his joy he did not at first notice a table on which were the diamonds. I threw myself upon it so cleverly that I was able, unseen by him, to fill with them my sailor's jacket and the pockets of my trousers. Mon Dieu ! but I did not take one-third of them. Under this table there were ingots of gold. I persuaded my comrade to fill as many sacks as we could carry with gold, pointing out to him that this was the only way in which our plunder would not lead to our being discovered abroad.

'"Pearls, jewels, and diamonds would only lead to our being recognised," I said to him.

'Whatever might be our eagerness for it, we could not take away more than two thousand pounds of gold, and this required six journeys through the prison to get it to the gondola. The sentinel at the water gate had been won over at the price of a sack of ten pounds of gold. As for the two gondoliers they were under the impression that they were serving the Republic. We made our start at daybreak. When we were in the open sea, and when I remembered that night, when I recalled all the sensations I had felt and when I saw again in imagination that vast treasure house, where, according to my estimate, I was leaving thirty millions in silver, twenty millions in gold, and many millions in diamonds, pearls, and rubies, there came upon me something like a fit of madness—I had the gold fever.

'We arranged to be put ashore at Smyrna, and there we at once embarked for France. When we were getting on board of the French ship Heaven did me the favour of ridding me of my accomplice. At the moment I did not realise the full result of this ill-natured stroke of chance, at which I rejoiced exceedingly. We were so utterly unnerved, that we had remained in a half-dazed condition without saying a word to each other, waiting till we were in safety to enjoy ourselves as we wished. It is not surprising that this rogue had his head a bit turned. You will see later on how God punished me!

'I did not feel I was safe till I had sold two-thirds of my diamonds in London and Amsterdam, and exchanged my gold dust for notes that could be cashed. For five years I hid myself in Madrid. Then, in 1770, I came to Paris under a Spanish name, and had a most brilliant career there. Bianca had died. But in the midst of my enjoyments, and when I had a fortune of six million francs at my command, I was struck with blindness. I have no doubt that this infirmity was the result of my stay in the dungeon, and of my toils when I burrowed through the stone, though perhaps my mania for seeing gold implied an abuse of the power of sight that predestined me to the loss of my eyes.

'At this time I was in love with a woman to whom I intended to unite my lot. I had told her the secret of my name. She belonged to a powerful family, and

I hoped for everything from the favour shown me by Louis xv. I had put my trust in this woman, who was the friend of Madame du Barry. She advised me to consult a famous oculist in London. But after we had stayed some months in that city, the woman gave me the slip one day in Hyde Park, after having robbed me of all my fortune, and left me without any resource. For being obliged to conceal my real name, which would hand me over to the vengeance of Venice, I could not appeal to any one for help. I was afraid of Venice. My infirmity was taken advantage of by spies with whom this woman had surrounded me. I spare you the story of adventures worthy of Gil Blas. Then came your Revolution. I was forced to become an inmate of the Quinze-Vingts Hospice, where this creature arranged for my admission, after having kept me for two years at the Bicêtre Asylum as a lunatic. I have never been able to kill her, for I could not see to do it, and I was too poor to hire another hand. If before I lost Benedetto Capri, my jailer, I had questioned him as to the position of my dungeon, I might have ascertained exactly where the treasure lay, and returned to Venice when the Republic was annihilated by Napoleon. . . .

'However, notwithstanding my blindness, let us go back to Venice! I will rediscover the door of the prison, I shall see the gold through its walls, I shall smell it even under waters beneath which it is buried. For the events that overthrew the power of Venice were

of such a kind, that the secret of this treasure must have died with Vendramino, the brother of Bianca, a Doge who I hoped would have made my peace with the Council of Ten. I wrote letters to the First Consul, I proposed an arrangement with the Emperor of Austria, but every one turned me away as a madman! Come, let us start for Venice, let us start even if we have to beg our way! We shall come back millionaires. We will repurchase my property and you shall be my heir. You will be Prince of Varese!'

In my astonishment at these revelations, which in my imagination assumed all the aspect of a poem, and looking at this grey head, and the dark waters of the ditches of the Bastille, stagnant water like that of the Venetian canals, I made no reply. Facino Cane concluded doubtless that I judged him as all the rest had done with a scornful pity, and he made a gesture that expressed all the philosophy of despair.

The narration had perhaps carried him back to his days of happiness at Venice. He seized his clarionet and played in a melancholy tone a Venetian air, a barcarolle, and, as he played, he regained the skill of his first years, the talent of a patrician lover. It was something like the lament by the rivers of Babylon. My eyes filled with tears. If any belated passers-by came along the Boulevard Bourdon, they must have paused to listen to this last prayer of the banished man, this last lament for a lost name, in which was mingled the recollection of Bianca. But gold soon reasserted its

mastery, and the fatal passion extinguished this gleam of youth.

'That treasure!' he said to me, 'I always see it, as in a waking dream. I walk about in the midst of it. The diamonds sparkle, and I am not as blind as you think. The gold and the diamonds illuminate my darkness, the night of the last Facino Cane, for my title goes to the Memmi. *Mon Dieu!* the murderer's punishment has begun soon enough! *Ave Maria. . . .*'

He recited some prayers which I could not hear.

'We shall go to Venice!' I said to him, when he rose.

'I have found a man, then!' he exclaimed, and his face lighted up.

I gave him my arm and took him home. At the door of the Quinze-Vingts he grasped my hand, while some of the guests from the wedding party passed on their way home with deafening shouts.

'Shall we start to-morrow?' said the old man.

'As soon as we have a little money.'

'But we can go on foot. I will beg alms. . . . I am strong, and one feels young when one sees gold in front of one.'

Facino Cane died that winter, after two months of lingering illness. The poor fellow had a catarrh.

LA GRANDE BRETÈCHE

A SHORT distance from Vendôme there stands on the banks of the Loire an old house of brown stone, surmounted by high pitched roofs. It is so completely isolated that there is in its neighbourhood neither the evil-smelling tannery nor the miserable inn that one sees in the outskirts of most small towns. In front of the house, looking out on the river, is a garden, in which the box hedges, formerly clipped into green walls for its alleys, are now allowed to grow as they will. Some willows springing from the margin of the Loire have grown as rapidly as the boundary hedges, and half conceal the house. The plants that we call weeds adorn with their beautiful foliage the slope towards the water. The fruit-trees, neglected for ten years, no longer produce a crop, and the suckers they have thrown out have grown into thickets. The fruit-trees trained on the walls have sprouted into wild bushes. The paths once bright with gravel are overgrown with moss; but, to tell the truth, there is no longer a trace of a path.

From the top of the hill crowned by the ruins of the old castle of the Dukes of Vendôme, the only spot from which the eye can look down into this enclosure,

one says to oneself that at a date, now difficult to fix, this little corner of the earth must have been the delight of some man of good position who busied himself with roses, with tulips, in a word, with horticulture, but who was at the same time a gourmand in the matter of choice fruit. One can make out an arched alley way, or rather the remains of it, and under it there is a table not entirely eaten away by time. At the sight of this ruined garden one pictures to oneself the passive delights of the quiet life enjoyed in the provinces, just as one imagines the humdrum existence of some honest shopkeeper as one reads the epitaph on his tomb. As if suggesting a final touch to the peaceful and pathetic fancies that take possession of one's mind, one of the walls shows a sundial adorned with this respectably pious inscription—'*Ultimum cogita!*'

The roofs of the house are in a terrible state of collapse; the shutters are always closed; the balconies are covered with swallows' nests; the doors remain continually shut. Tall grasses mark out in green lines the joints of the door-steps. The iron work is rust-eaten. Sun, moon, winter, summer and snow have worn away the woodwork, warped the boarding, ruined the paintwork.

The mournful silence that broods over it all is disturbed only by the birds, the cats, the weasels, the rats and mice that are free to run about, fight, and eat each other. Everywhere an unseen hand has written the word 'Mystery.' If, moved by curiosity, you go and

take a look at the house from the road, you see a large entrance gate, arched at the top, in the doors of which the children of the countryside have knocked several holes. Later on I found out that this entrance had been closed for some ten years. Through these irregular openings in it you can make out that the courtyard in front of the house is in just the same condition as the garden on its river front. The same disorder prevails there. Tufts of grass frame the flags of the pavement. The walls are furrowed with great cracks, and their blackened ridges are a tangle of thousands of clumps of wallflowers. The steps at the door are disjointed, the cord of the bell is rotten, the rain pipes are broken. 'Has the fire of heaven fallen upon the place? What tribunal has ordered salt to be sown upon this habitation? Has God been insulted here? or France betrayed?' These are the questions that come into one's mind. The reptiles that come crawling by give no answer. This empty and deserted house presents a huge enigma, of which no one knows the solution.

It was formerly the centre of a small feudal holding, and bears the name of La Grande Bretèche. During the time of my stay at Vendôme, where Dr. Desplein had sent me to take care of a rich patient, the sight of this strange abode became for me a source of the keenest pleasure. Was it not much better than a mere ruin? A ruin has connected with it certain memories, about the authenticity of which there is no doubt. But this dwelling place, still standing though it was being

slowly demolished by some avenging hand, held a secret, some unknown idea. At the very least it suggested some strange caprice. More than once, in the evenings, I pressed my way through the hedge—now run wild —that enclosed its grounds. Braving a few scratches I forced an entrance into this ownerless garden, this estate that was no longer either public or private. I remained there whole hours considering its disordered condition. I did not care to put even one question to some talkative citizen of Vendôme for the sake of learning the story of the origin of this singular spectacle. But there I composed delightful romances, I abandoned myself to little bouts of melancholy thought that charmed me. If I had known the reason—perhaps a commonplace one—for this desolation, I would have lost all the unwritten poetry in which I took such wild delight.

To my mind this place of refuge brought up the most diverse pictures of human life, darkened by misfortune. Now it had for me the air of a cloister without its monks; now it told of the peace of a cemetery, without the dead speaking to one in the language of their epitaphs. To-day it would be the house of a leper; to-morrow that of the Atridæ. But all the while it was provincial France with its homely ideas, its life running quietly like an hour-glass. I often wept there; I never laughed. More than once I felt an involuntary terror as I heard above my head the deep rushing sound of the wings of some startled ring-dove.

The soil there is damp. One must be on the look-

out for the lizards, the vipers, the frogs that move about in all the wild freedom of nature. Above all one must not be afraid of cold, for at times you feel as if a mantle of ice were placed upon your shoulders, like the death cold hand of the Commandant on the neck of Don Juan. One evening there I fairly shuddered. Just as I had finished thinking out a sombre enough story as an explanation of this kind of wretchedness built up in stone, the wind set in motion a rusty old weathercock, and its creaking sound was like a wailing cry from the house itself. I went back to my inn, a prey to gloomy thoughts.

After I had had my supper, my hostess entered my room with an air of mystery, and said to me:—

'Sir, Monsieur Regnault is here.'

'Who is Monsieur Regnault?'

'What! Monsieur does not know Monsieur Regnault! well, that's odd!' she said as she went out.

Suddenly I saw entering the room a tall, slightly built man dressed in black and holding his hat in his hand. He came in with his head bent forward like a ram ready to charge its rival, and presented to me a retreating forehead, a little pointed head, and a pale face with a complexion like a glass of dirty water. You might have taken him for the door-keeper at one of the ministries in Paris. The stranger wore an old coat, showing a good deal of wear in its creases, but he had a diamond in his shirt-frill and gold earrings in his ears.

'Whom have I the honour of addressing, sir?' said I to him.

He took his seat on a chair, turned to the fire, placed his hat on my table and replied to me, rubbing his hands :—

'Ah ! it's very cold. I am Monsieur Regnault, sir.'

I bowed, saying to myself, '*Il Bondocani !* look out !'

'I am,' he went on, 'a notary at Vendôme.'

'I am delighted to hear it, sir !' I exclaimed, 'but I am not in a position to make my will just now for reasons well known to myself.'

'Just a moment !' he began again, raising his hand as if to impose silence. 'Allow me, sir, allow me ! I have been informed that you sometimes go and take a walk in the garden of La Grande Bretèche.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Just a moment,' he said, repeating his gesture. 'This action on your part amounts to a real breach of the law. I have come, sir, in the name and as executor of the late Madame la Comtesse de Merret, to request that you will cease your visits. Just a moment ! I am not a Turk, and I don't want to make your conduct into a crime. Besides, you may very well be ignorant of the circumstances which oblige me to allow the finest residence in Vendôme to go to ruin. Nevertheless, sir, you appear to be an educated man, and you ought to be aware that the laws forbid any one to trespass on enclosed property, and this under serious penalties. A hedge counts for as much as a wall. But the state in which the house is may serve as an excuse for your curiosity. Personally I should be quite satisfied

to leave you free to come and go about that house; but having been entrusted with the execution of the will of the testatrix, I have the honour, sir, to request that you will not again enter the garden. Since the will was opened, sir, I myself have not set foot in that house, which, as I have had the honour to tell you, forms part of the property left by Madame de Merret. We have merely taken note of the number of its doors and windows, in order to assess the amount of the taxes which I pay, provided annually out of funds for this purpose by the late Countess. Ah! my dear sir, her will made a great stir in Vendôme.'

Here the worthy man stopped to blow his nose. I listened respectfully to his loquacity, for I could thoroughly well realise that the administration of the will of Madame de Merret was the most important event of his life, the summit of his reputation, his glory, all that the Restoration was for a good Royalist. I must say good-bye to my delightful reveries and romances. So I had no reluctance to give myself the pleasure of learning the truth in an official way.

'Sir,' I said to him, 'would it be an indiscretion on my part to ask you the reason for this eccentric arrangement?'

At these words there came over the face of the notary a look that expressed all the pleasure, which men feel who have the habit of mounting their hobby. He pulled up the collar of his shirt with a touch of foppery, took out his snuff-box, opened it, and offered

me a pinch; and on my refusing it he took a big one himself. He was happy! A man who has not a hobby does not know all the joy one can get in life. A hobby is the golden mean between a passion and a monomania. At that moment I understood the full force of this fine expression of Sterne's, and I fully realised the joy with which Uncle Toby, aided by Corporal Trim, set himself astride of his charger.

'Sir,' said Monsieur Regnault to me, 'I was the chief clerk of Maître Roguin of Paris, a first-class office, which you have doubtless heard spoken of? No? However, an unfortunate bankruptcy made it famous. As I had not a sufficent fortune to carry on business in Paris with prices at the level everything went up to in 1816, I came here and bought the practice of my predecessor. I had some relations in Vendôme, amongst others a very rich aunt, who gave me her daughter in marriage. . . . Well, sir,' he continued, after a slight pause, 'three months after having been admitted to my profession here by Monseigneur, the keeper of the seals, one night, just as I was going to bed—I was not yet married then—I was summoned by Madame la Comtesse de Merret to her château of Merret. Her lady's maid, an excellent young woman who is now employed in this very hotel, was at my door with the Countess's carriage. Ah! just a moment! . . . I must tell you, sir, that, two months before I arrived here, Monsieur le Comte de Merret had gone away to die in Paris. He came to a wretched end there, while he was abandoning himself

to all kinds of excesses. You understand? On the day of his departure Madame la Comtesse had left La Grande Bretèche and sent away all the furniture of the house. Some persons even allege that she burned all the furniture, the hangings, finally all the things in general of whatsoever kind, which furnish the premises at present leased by the said person. . . . Why, what am I saying? Excuse me, I thought I was dictating a lease . . . that she burned them,' he continued, 'in the meadow at Merret. Have you been to Merret, sir? No?' he said, replying for me to his own question. 'Ah, it is a very pretty place! For about three months,' said he, continuing his story after giving a little shake of his head, Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse had been living in a singular fashion. They no longer received any guests. Madame had her rooms on the ground floor, and Monsieur his on the first story. When Madame la Comtesse was left alone she never again showed herself in the church. Later on, when she had taken up her residence at the château, she refused to see her friends—even her lady friends—who came to visit her. She was already greatly changed at the time when she left La Grande Bretèche to go to Merret. This dear lady (I say dear because this diamond came to me from her, though for that matter I never saw her but once) . . . well, this good woman was very ill. No doubt she had given up all hope of recovery, for she died without once expressing a wish to see a doctor: that is why many of our

ladies here thought she was not quite right in her head.

'Well then, sir, my curiosity was strangely excited when I heard that Madame de Merret required my professional services. I was not the only one who took an interest in this affair. That very evening, late as it was, all the town got to know that I was going to Merret. The lady's maid gave rather vague answers to the questions I put to her on the way. However, she told me that her mistress had received the last rites of the Church from the Curé of Merret during the day, and that it looked as if she would not live through the night. I reached the château about eleven o'clock. I went up the great staircase. After having passed through some large rooms, lofty and dark and devilishly cold and damp they were, I reached at last the state bedroom, where Madame la Comtesse was.

'Considering what gossip was current about this lady —I would never get to the end of it, sir, if I were to tell you all the stories that were repeated about her—I pictured her to myself as something of a coquette. Just imagine, I had a lot of difficulty to see where she was in the great bed in which she lay. It is true that there was only one old-fashioned Argand lamp to light this enormous room with, its decorative carvings in the style of the ancient régime, so covered with dust that it almost made one sneeze to look at them. Ah, but you have never been to Merret! Well, sir, the bed was one of those old four-posters, with a tester hung with

flowered chintz. A little table was near the bed, and I saw on it an *Imitation of Christ*, which by the way I bought for my wife at the sale, as well as the lamp. There was also a big armchair for her waiting woman, and two other chairs. No fire by the way. That was all the furniture. It would not have taken up two lines in a catalogue. Ah, my dear sir, if you had seen, as I then saw it, that huge room hung with brown curtains, you really would have thought you had been transported to some scene in a novel. It was chilling, nay, more than that, 'funereal' he added, raising his hand with a theatrical gesture, and making a pause.

'By dint of looking hard and coming close up to the bed, at last I saw Madame de Merret by the light of the lamp, the rays of which shone upon the pillows. Her face was as yellow as wax, and so wrinkled, it looked like a pair of hands held close together. Madame la Comtesse wore a lace night-cap, that let one see her beautiful hair falling from under it, but it was white as snow. She was sitting up in the bed and seemed to keep that position with much difficulty. Her large black eyes, sunken with the fever no doubt, and nearly dead, hardly stirred under the eyelashes, in their bony sockets. There,' he said, pointing to the arch of his own eyebrows, 'her forehead was damp. Her wasted hands were like bones covered with skin, tightly stretched; one could easily see the lines of her veins and muscles. She must have once been very beautiful; but at that moment I was seized by a feeling

I cannot describe, as I looked at her. According to what I was told by those who buried her, a living creature never was more wasted away before death. In one word, it was something frightful to see! Her malady had so worn away this woman, that she was just like a ghost. Her lips, of a pale violet tint, seemed to me to be motionless, even when she spoke. Although my profession had made me used to such sights, as it brings me from time to time to the bedside of dying people to put their last wishes on record, I confess that families in tears and men in their death-agony were all nothing compared to that lonely, silent woman in the midst of that immense château.

'I did not hear the least sound, I could not distinguish the movement that the respiration of the sick woman ought to have caused in the bedclothes that covered her, and I myself stood motionless in a kind of stupor. I can fancy myself there now. At last her large eyes moved, she tried to raise her right hand, which fell back on the bed, and these words came from her lips like a dull murmur, for her voice was no longer like human speech; "I have been expecting you very impatiently." A flush of colour came on her cheeks. It was an effort, sir, for her to speak.

'"Madame . . ." I said to her. She made a sign for me to be silent. At this moment the old woman who was taking care of her rose and whispered in my ear, "Do not speak, Madame la Comtesse has gone beyond the stage at which she can hear even the least

sound, and if you could speak to her, it would only disturb her."

'I sat down. A few moments later Madame de Merret collected all the strength that was left to her, and moved her right arm. She put her hand, not without endless efforts, under the bolster. She paused just for a moment. She made a last effort to withdraw her hand, and as she held out a sealed paper, drops of sweat fell from her forehead. "I entrust my last will to you . . ." she said. "Ah, mon Dieu, ah!" This was all. She grasped a crucifix that lay on the bed, raised it quickly to her lips, and died.

'The expression of her rigidly fixed eyes makes me shudder when I think of it. She must have suffered a great deal! There was joy in her last look, and the expression remained fixed in her dead eyes.

'I took away the will, and when it was opened I found that Madame de Merret had made me her legal executor. With the exception of some private legacies she left the whole of her property to the hospital of Vendôme. But listen to her arrangements with regard to La Grande Bretèche. She enjoined me to leave this house, for the term of fifty years from the day of her death, in the state in which it actually was at the moment of her decease. I was to prevent any person whatsoever from entering its rooms, and she forbade the slightest repairs to be made to it, and even provided an annual allowance, so that if necessary watchmen should be engaged to enforce the complete

fulfilment of these her last wishes. At the expiration of the assigned period, if the intentions of the testatrix had been fulfilled, the house was to belong to my heirs, for, as Monsieur knows, notaries themselves cannot accept legacies. Otherwise La Grande Bretèche was to become the property of any one who could establish a claim to it, but under the condition that they should observe certain provisions set forth in a codicil attached to the will, which codicil is not to be opened before the expiration of the aforesaid fifty years. The will was not contested by any one, therefore . . .'

With this word, and without finishing the sentence, the lanky notary looked at me with an air of triumph. I made him quite happy by addressing a few words of compliment to him.

'Sir,' I said, 'you have made such a strong impression on me that I can imagine I am looking at this dying woman, paler than the sheets of the bed; her glistening eyes are a terror to me. I shall dream of her to-night. But you must have made some conjectures regarding the provisions set forth in this singular will.'

'Sir,' he answered me, with an amusing air of discreet reserve, 'I never allow myself to sit in judgment on the conduct of persons who honour me with the gift of a diamond.'

I soon loosened the tongue of this scrupulous notary, and he then communicated to me—not without long digressions—the conclusions arrived at by the wiseacres of both sexes whose judgments have the force of law

at Vendôme. But these conclusions were so contradictory, and so long winded, that I had some difficulty in keeping myself awake, notwithstanding the interest I took in this authoritative account of the affair. The dull tone, and the monotonous voice of the notary, who was no doubt well used to hear himself talk and to make his clients and fellow townsmen listen to him, at length had the better even of my curiosity. . . . Happily at last he left me.

'Ah! ah! sir,' he said to me on the stairs, 'there are many people that would like to live another forty-five years; but, just a moment! . . .'

And with a knowing air he put the first finger of his hand to the side of his nose, as if he meant to say, 'Pay strict attention to this!'

'But to go so far as that,' he added, 'one must not be in the sixties!'

I closed my door after having been roused from my apathy by this last sally, which the notary evidently thought very witty. Then I seated myself in my arm-chair, putting my feet on the two fire-dogs before the grate. I was plunging into a romance of the gloomy old style of Mrs. Radcliffe, when my door, pushed open by the light touch of a woman's hand, turned on its hinges. I saw my hostess coming in, a stout, smiling, good-humoured woman, who had missed her vocation; she was of the type of a Fleming, and ought to have figured in some picture of Teniers.

'Well, sir,' she said to me, 'no doubt Monsieur

Regnault has been spinning out his long story of La Grande Bretèche to you?'

'Yes, mother Lepas.

'What has he told you?'

I repeated to her in a few words the gloomy, blood-curdling story of Madame de Merret. At each sentence my hostess stretched out her neck and looked at me with the keen insight of an innkeeper, a kind of average between the instinct of a gendarme, the cunning of a spy, and the trickery of a dealer.

'My dear Madame Lepas,' I added as I ended, 'you seem to know something more, eh? Otherwise, why should you come here to me?'

'Ah! on the good faith of an honest woman, as sure as my name is Lepas . . .'

'Now don't swear. Your eyes are big with a secret. You knew Monsieur de Merret. What kind of a man was he?'

'Law! Monsieur de Merret, you see, was a fine figure of a man, so tall that it was a long job to look at him from head to foot! a worthy gentleman, who came from Picardy, and who was, as we say here, a bit touchy. He used to pay cash down, so as never to have disputes with any one. He was a lively fellow, you see. Our ladies all thought him very amiable.'

'Because he was so lively?' said I to my hostess.

'Very likely,' she said. 'You may well believe, sir, that as they say, one had to have good prospects in the world to marry Madame de Merret, who, without wish-

ing to say any ill of others, was the most beautiful and the richest lady round about Vendôme. She had an income of twenty thousand livres from property in this neighbourhood. All the town went to her marriage. The bride was a dainty, winning little thing, a real jewel of a woman! Ah! they made a handsome couple that day!'

'Were they happy in their married life?'

'Hum! hum! yes and no, so far as one could make out. For, as you can imagine, people of our class were not hand and glove with them! Madame de Merret was a good woman, very elegant, who perhaps after all had sometimes to suffer from the vivacity of her husband; and though he was a little proud, we liked him. Bah, it was the nature of his class to be like that! When one is a noble, you see . . .'

'However, there must of course have been a catastrophe of some kind to cause this violent separation between Monsieur and Madame de Merret?'

'I never said there was any catastrophe, sir. I know nothing about it.'

'Well, I feel quite sure now that you know everything.'

'Well, sir, I am going to tell you everything. When I saw Monsieur Regnault going up to your room, I quite made up my mind that he would talk to you about Madame de Merret in connection with La Grande Bretèche. That gave me the idea of asking your advice, sir, for I take you to be a man of good counsel, who would be incapable of misleading a poor woman like me,

who has never done any one the least harm, though all the same I am troubled by my conscience. Till this moment I have never dared to open my mind to the people of this neighbourhood here, who are all gossips with biting tongues. And then, sir, I have never had a visitor who remained so long in my hotel, and to whom I could venture to tell the story of the fifteen thousand francs. . . .'

'My dear Madame Lepas,' I replied, stopping the flow of her words, 'if your confidences are of a kind to compromise me, I would not for all the world be entrusted with them.'

'You have nothing to be afraid of,' she said interrupting me, 'as you will see.'

Her eagerness made me think that I was not the only one to whom my good hostess had imparted the secret of which I was supposed to be the sole depositary, and I listened.

'At the time, sir,' she said, 'when the Emperor used to send here prisoners of war from Spain and elsewhere, I had to find lodgings, at the expense of the Government, for a young Spaniard who had been sent to Vendôme on parole. Though he had given his parole he had to go every day and report himself to the subprefect. He was a grandee of Spain! Excuse me a moment—he had a name ending in *os* and *dia*, something like Bagos de Férédia. I have his name noted somewhere in my list of visitors. You can read it there if you like. Oh, he was a fine young man for a

Spaniard, who they say are all ugly! He was barely five feet two or three inches high, but he was very well made. He had little hands that he took such care of. Ah! you should have seen, he had as many brushes for his hands as a woman has for her whole toilet! He had long black hair, an eye of fire, rather a bronzed complexion, but I liked it all the same. He had such fine linen as I have never seen on any one else, though I have had princesses here, and amongst other guests General Bertrand, the Duke and Duchess of Abrantès, Monsieur Descazes and the King of Spain. He did not eat much, but one could not find fault with him for that, he had such polished, such winning manners. Oh! I was very fond of him, though he would not say four words in the course of a day, and it was impossible to have the slightest conversation with him. If one spoke to him he would not reply. It is an oddity, a mania they all have, by what I am told. He read his breviary like a priest, he went to mass and to all the services. And where did he chose his place? We all remarked it later on—two steps from the pew of Madame de Merret. But as he knelt there the very first time he went to the church, no one imagined that there was any particular object in it. Besides he never raised his nose from his prayer-book, the poor young man! Then, sir, in the evening he would walk about on the hill among the ruins of the castle. It was his only amusement, poor fellow, it reminded him of his own country. They say Spain is all hills!

'From the first days of his detention here he kept late hours. I was anxious at seeing that he did not come home till the stroke of midnight. But we got used to this fancy of his; he took the door key with him and we ceased to sit up for him. He lodged in the house that we had in the Rue des Casernes. Then one of our stablemen told us that one evening when he took the horses down to the Loire to walk them in the water he thought he saw the Spanish grandee swimming far off in the river—swimming like a fish. When he came home I told him to take care not to get entangled in the water weeds, and he seemed annoyed at having been seen in the water. At last sir, one day, or rather one morning, we found that he was not in his room. He had not come home. By dint of searching everywhere I found a piece of writing in the drawer of his table, in which there were fifty Spanish pieces of gold, of the kind they call "Moidores," and which would be worth about five thousand francs, and, besides these, diamonds to the value of ten thousand francs in a little sealed box. The writing said that, in case he did not return, he left us this money and these diamonds on condition that we would have masses said to thank God for his escape from captivity, and to pray for his salvation.

'At that time I had still my husband, and he went to look for him. And now comes a singular incident. He brought back some of the Spaniard's clothes, which he had found under a big stone among some stakes on the river bank, in the direction of the castle and nearly

opposite La Grande Bretèche. My husband had gone out there so early in the morning that no one saw him. He burned the clothes, after having read the letter, and, according to Count Férédia's wish, we declared that he had made his escape. The sub-prefect sent all the gendarmerie off after him; but, whew! he was never caught. Lepas thought he must have been drowned. But as for me, sir, I don't believe it; I rather think that he had something to do with the affair of Madame de Merret, because Rosalie told me that the crucifix, by which her mistress set so much value that she had it buried with her, was of ebony and silver. Now during the first part of his stay here Monsieur Férédia had one of ebony and silver, which I never after saw in his possession. Well, sir, is it not true that I need have no remorse about the Spaniard's fifteen thousand francs and that they are fairly mine?'

'Certainly. But you never tried to question Rosalie?' said I to her.

'Oh, yes indeed, sir! But what use was it? That girl is like a wall. She knows something but it is impossible to set her tongue going.'

After having talked a little longer with me, my hostess left me a prey to vague and gloomy thoughts, a romantic curiosity, a religious awe something like the deep feeling which comes over one when some night one enters a dark church and sees a dim light far off under its lofty arches—a figure half seen glides past, one catches the rustle of a dress or of a soutane, and

one shudders. La Grande Bretèche, with its tall grass, its shuttered windows, its rusted ironwork, its closed doors, its deserted rooms, came up all at once in my imagination. I tried in thought to penetrate into that abode of mystery, seeking there the connecting link of this grim story, of this drama that had been the death of three people.

In my eyes Rosalie was now the most interesting being in Vendôme. Observing her closely, notwithstanding the glow of health that shone on her plump features, I remarked traces of some hidden thought. She must have in her mind some permanent source of either remorse or anxious hope. Her expression told of some secret, it might seem like that of a devotee who is carried away by excess of fervour in prayer, or on the other hand like some poor girl who hears always the last cry of her murdered child. All the same her general manner was simple and dull; in her silly smile there was no trace of the criminal; and you would have made up your mind about her innocence only to see the red and blue chequered kerchief that covered her ample bosom, and was closely secured in the opening of her dress of white and violet stripes.

'No,' I thought, 'I shall not leave Vendôme without finding out the whole story of La Grande Bretèche. And to gain this end I shall even make love to Rosalie if it is absolutely necessary.'

'Rosalie?' I said to her one evening.

'I beg your pardon, sir?'

'You are not married?'

She gave a slight start. 'Oh! I shall have offers enough whenever a fancy for being miserable comes over me,' she said, laughing.

She quickly controlled any sign of inward emotion, for all women, from the fine lady down to the servant in a tavern inclusively, have a self-possession that is all their own.

'You are fresh enough, winning enough, not to want for lovers! But tell me, Rosalie, why did you choose to become a servant in an inn after leaving Madame de Merret? Can it be that she did not give you any pension?'

'Oh, yes indeed! But, sir, my place is the best in Vendôme.'

This reply was of the class which judges and lawyers call 'evasive.' Rosalie's position in this romantic history seemed to me like that of the middle square of the draught-board. She was in the very centre of interest, the centre of the true solution. She seemed to me tied up in the knot of complications. It was no ordinary attraction that drew me on. In this girl was embodied the last chapter of a romance, so from that moment Rosalie became the special object of my attentions. When I began to study this woman, I noticed a number of good qualities in her, as one does with any woman who becomes the chief object of one's thoughts; she was neat and careful about herself; she was pretty, it need hardly be said; she had soon all the

attractions that our own feelings can give to women whatever their position may be.

A fortnight after the notary's visit, one evening, or rather one morning, for it was very early, I said to Rosalie:—

'Will you tell me now all that you know about Madame de Merret?'

'Oh!' she answered with a look of terror, 'don't ask me that, Mr. Horace!'

Her beautiful face became gloomy, the bright animated colour on her cheeks gave way to paleness, and her eyes had no longer their humid radiance. I insisted nevertheless.

'Well,' she said at last, 'since you will have it, I will tell it to you. But you must keep my secret carefully.'

'Come, come, my poor girl, I shall keep all your secrets with the honour there is among thieves, and that is the most reliable thing there is in the world.'

'If it's the same to you,' she said, 'I would prefer it to be kept by your own honour.'

With this she adjusted her kerchief, and settled down as if to tell her story; for indeed there is an attitude of confidence and comfort that is quite necessary to the telling of a tale. The best stories are related at a certain hour when all are seated at table. No one can tell a story really well when he is standing up or fasting. But if I had to reproduce verbatim the diffuse eloquence of Rosalie, a whole volume would hardly give space for it. Now as the event, of which she gave me a confused

account, fits in between the gossip of the notary and that of Madame Lepas, as precisely as the middle terms of an arithmetical proportion come between its two extremes, I need only tell it to you in a few words. I therefore summarise it.

The room that Madame de Merret occupied at La Bretèche was situated on the ground floor. A little closet about four feet deep, constructed in the thickness of the wall, was used by her as a wardrobe. Three months before the evening, the events of which I am going to tell you, Madame de Merret had been so unwell that her husband left her by herself in her room, and slept in one on the first floor. By one of those chances that it is impossible to foresee, he returned that evening two hours later than usual from the club, where he used to go to read the newspapers and talk politics with the people of the neighbourhood. His wife thought he had already come in and gone to bed and to sleep. But the invasion of France had been the subject of a very animated discussion; there had been an exciting billiard match, at which he had lost forty francs, an enormous sum at Vendôme, where every one is hoarding up money, and where the everyday ways of life are defined by laudable moderation, which is perhaps a source of such true happiness as the average Parisian does not care for. For some time Monsieur de Merret had always been satisfied with asking Rosalie if her mistress had gone to bed, and on her replying in the affirmative, he would go at once to his own room,

in all the good humour that comes of a habit of mutual confidence. But when he came home this night he took a fancy to go to Madame de Merret and tell her of his misadventure, perhaps to get some consolation for it. At dinner that evening he had remarked that Madame de Merret was very daintily dressed. On his way home from the club he had said to himself that his wife must be recovered from her illness, that her convalescence had made her look prettier, and that he had been a little slow in remarking it, as husbands are in noticing anything. Instead of calling Rosalie, who at the moment was occupied in the kitchen, watching the cook and the coachman play out a difficult hand at cards, Monsieur de Merret went towards his wife's room by the light of his hand lantern, which he had put down on the first step of the stairs. His tread, which was easily recognisable, re-echoed under the arched roof of the corridor. At the moment that he turned the key of his wife's room, he thought he heard some one closing the door of the closet, of which I have told you. But when he entered, Madame de Merret was alone, standing in front of the fireplace. The husband thought quite simply that Rosalie was in the closet. However a suspicion, that tinkled in his ear like the sound of a bell, made him mistrustful. He looked at his wife and saw in her eyes something wild and troubled.

'You have come home very late,' she said.

Her voice, that was usually so clear and sweet, seemed slightly changed. Monsieur de Merret did

not reply, for at this moment Rosalie entered. It was a thunderbolt for him. He walked up and down the room, passing from one window to the other, with a regular step, and with his arms folded.

'Have you heard some bad news or are you ill?' his wife asked him timidly, while Rosalie began to undress her.

He kept silent.

'You can go,' said Madame de Merret to her maid, 'I will put in my curl-papers myself.'

From the mere look of her husband's face she suspected some misfortune, and she wanted to be alone with him. When Rosalie had gone away, or when they thought she had gone, for she remained some time in the corridor, Monsieur de Merret took his stand in front of his wife and said to her coldly :—

'Madame, there is some one in your wardrobe.'

She looked quite calmly at her husband and answered him simply :—

'No, sir.'

That 'No' went to Monsieur de Merret's heart, for he did not believe it. And all the same his wife had never seemed to him purer and holier than she looked at that moment. He turned as if to go and open the closet. Madame de Merret took him by the hand, stopped him, looked at him with an air of melancholy, and said to him in a voice full of deep feeling :—

'If you find no one there, remember that all is over between us!'

The incredible dignity that was stamped upon the whole bearing of the woman, inspired the man with profound esteem for her, and suggested to him one of those resolves that lack only a wider field to become famous for all time.

'No, Josephine,' he said, 'I shall not go there. Whether the result was one thing or the other, we should be parted for ever. Listen to me. I know all the purity of your soul, and I know that you lead a holy life. You would not commit a mortal sin even to save your life.'

At these words Madame de Merret glanced at her husband with a haggard look.

'See, here is your crucifix,' the man went on; 'swear to me before God that there is no one there, and I will believe you. I will not open that door.'

Madame de Merret took the crucifix and said:—

'I swear it!'

'Louder,' said her husband, 'and repeat the words "I swear before God that there is no one in that closet."'

She repeated the words without any hesitation.

'It is well,' said Monsieur de Merret coldly.

After a moment's silence he said, while he examined the crucifix, which was of ebony mounted with silver and with a very artistic figure:—

'You have a very beautiful thing here. I did not know you had it.'

'I found it at Duvivier's shop. When that party of

prisoners passed through Vendôme last year, he bought it from a Spanish monk.'

'Ah!' said Monsieur de Merret, as he hung the crucifix again on its nail on the wall.

Then he rang the bell. Rosalie soon appeared. Monsieur de Merret went quickly to meet her, led her to the bay of the window that looked out on the garden, and said to her in a low voice:—

'I know that Gorenflot would like to marry you, that poverty is the only thing that prevents you setting up house together, and that you have told him you will not be his wife unless he can find the means to set up as a master mason. . . . Well, go and see him, and tell him to come here at once with his trowel and his other tools. Take care to wake no one else but him in his house. His fortune will be beyond anything you can wish for. Above all when you go out of this don't gossip, otherwise . . .'

He gave a frown. Rosalie moved to go. He called her back.

'Here, take my latchkey,' he said.

'Jean!' Monsieur de Merret called out in a voice of thunder in the corridor.

Jean who was at the same time his coachman and his confidential servant left his card party and came to him.

'Go to bed, all of you,' said his master, making a sign to him to come near.

Then he added, but in a low voice:—

'When they are all asleep—*asleep*, do you thoroughly understand?—you will come down and let me know.'

Monsieur de Merret who had never let his wife out of his sight even while he gave his orders, came quietly back to her as she sat by the fire, and began to tell her the events of the billiard match and the discussion at the club. When Rosalie returned she found Monsieur and Madame de Merret talking together in a very friendly way. He had lately had new ceiling put to all the apartments of his suite of reception-rooms on the ground floor. Plaster of Paris is a rarity at Vendôme, for the cost of conveyance greatly increases its price. He had therefore had a rather large supply of it brought to his place, for he knew that he could always find buyers for what was left over. It was this circumstance that suggested to him the plan he put into execution.

'Monsieur Gorenflot is here,' said Rosalie in a low voice.

'Let him come in,' replied the Picard aloud.

Madame de Merret turned slightly pale when she saw the mason.

'Gorenflot,' said her husband, 'go and get some of the bricks you will find in the coach-house, and bring enough of them to wall up the door of that closet; you will then use the plaster we have left to cover up the brickwork.'

Then calling Rosalie and the workman to him, he said in a low voice:—

'Attend to me, Gorenflot. You are to sleep in this

house to-night, but to-morrow morning you will be given a passport to go to a foreign country, to a town which I will point out to you. I will hand you six thousand francs for your journey. You will remain ten years in that town. If you are not comfortable there, you can establish yourself in some other, provided that it is in the same country. You will go by way of Paris, where you will wait to see me. There I will secure to you by a bond another sum of six thousand francs, which will be paid to you on your return to France provided you have fulfilled all the conditions of our contract. For this reward you must observe the most absolute secrecy about what you are to do to-night. . . . As for you, Rosalie, I shall give you ten thousand francs, which will not be paid to you till your wedding-day, and on condition that you marry Monsieur Gorenflot; but if you mean to marry him you must keep silence, otherwise, there is no dowry for you.'

'Rosalie,' said Madame de Merret, 'come and do my hair.'

The husband walked quietly up and down the room, keeping a watch on the door, his wife, and the mason, but without making any offensive show of suspicion. Gorenflot could not avoid making some noise. Madame de Merret took advantage of a moment when the workman was throwing down a load of bricks, and her husband was at the other end of the room, to say to Rosalie :—

'Ten thousand francs a year for yourself, my dear

child, if you can tell Gorenflot to leave an open slit at the bottom of the wall.'

Then she said to her aloud and quite calmly, 'Go and help him!'

Monsieur and Madame de Merret did not exchange a word during all the time that Gorenflot took to wall up the door. This silence was a matter of deliberate purpose with the husband, who did not want to give his wife the pretext for uttering words that might have some hidden meaning; and with Madame de Merret it was prompted by prudence or pride. When the wall was built up to about half its height the cunning mason took advantage of a moment when the husband had his back turned to him, to put the point of his pick through one of the two panes of glass in the door. This act of his gave Madame de Merret to understand that Rosalie had spoken to Gorenflot. Just then all the three caught a glimpse of the dark, bronzed face of a man, with black hair, and a look of fire in his eyes. Before her husband could turn round, the poor woman had time to make a sign with her head to the stranger, for whom the nod signified 'Don't lose hope!' At four o'clock when the first grey dawn was breaking, for it was the month of September, the work was finished. The mason remained in the house in Jean's keeping, and Monsieur de Merret slept in his wife's room. In the morning, as he rose, he said carelessly:—

'Ah, confound it, I must go the mairie for the passport!'

He put his hat on his head, made three steps towards the door, then, as if by an afterthought, he took the crucifix. His wife felt a thrill of happiness.

'He will go away to Duvivier's,' she thought.

But as soon as he had gone out, Madame de Merret rang for Rosalie. Then she cried out in a terrible tone of voice :—

'The pick! the pick! to work! I saw how Gorenflot set about doing it yesterday. We shall have time to make a hole and then close it up again.'

In the twinkling of an eye Rosalie brought a kind of small pick-axe to her mistress, who, with an energy that no one could have imagined her capable of, set to work to demolish the wall. She had already sent some bricks flying, when, as she swung back to give a more vigorous blow than the rest, she saw Monsieur de Merret standing behind her. She fainted.

'Lay Madame on her bed,' said the husband coldly.

Foreseeing what would happen during his absence he had set a trap for his wife. He had already written to the mayor, and sent a summons to Duvivier. The jeweller arrived just at the moment when the wreckage in the room had been repaired.

'Duvivier,' he asked him, 'have you not bought crucifixes from Spaniards passing through the town?'

'No, sir.'

'That's all, thank you,' said he, as he exchanged a tigerish look with his wife. 'Jean,' he went on turning to his confidential servant, 'you will have my meals

served here in Madame de Merret's room. She is ill, and I shall not leave her till she has recovered.'

The cruel man stayed for twenty days beside his wife.

At first, when there was a noise in the closet, and Josephine thought of imploring his mercy for the dying stranger, he would reply to her, without allowing her to say a single word :—

'You swore to me on the cross that there was no one there!'

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